Afro-Pessimism Reconsidered: An Analysis of International Non-Governmental Organisations' Communications in East Africa

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In memory of my father, Professor William Kabampene Isharaza

To my mother, Grace Birabwa Namutebi

With my wife, Diana Phoebe Nampeera Isharaza

For our daughter, Netanya Ayinza Ramya Isharaza

And son, Amariah Shoroora Gulumiza Isharaza

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Abstract

Over the past thirty years, International Non-Governmental Organisations communication (INGO Communication) has been the subject of contentious debate as regards three major issues. First, its simplistic but emotive narratives and imagery of beneficiaries and the implications of this on their dignity. Secondly, INGO communication's rapidly growing influence on the media, with particular concern being raised about the blurring of lines between INGO media activism or advocacy and journalistic independence. Third, the collective responsibility that INGOs have for the media image of the Global South, most notably in Africa, where most countries are still dependent on Western aid for a significant portion of their national budget financing, infrastructure and service delivery. Media and development researchers have severally argued that INGOs' communication practices contribute to an essentialisation of the continent, also known as Afro-pessimism. Most, however, have tended to conceptualise INGOs as homogenous global entities and study their interaction with the media from the position of journalism studies rather than that of the INGOs themselves.

Using participant observation, interviews and my professional experience, this research seeks to achieve three objectives. First, to provide better understanding of INGOs' global governance and management structure. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of their communication processes and practices especially from the perspective of employees based in the Global South who are the primary sources of INGOs' visual images and narratives on Africa. Secondly, I draw attention to the unique ways in which INGOs interchangeably employ journalistic values and promotional styles to their communication efforts in order to achieve their advocacy and promotional goals. This approach makes it possible to go beyond the binary judgement of INGO communication to instead understand how and why these organisations communicate the way they do. Lastly, I demonstrate the ways in which INGO employees based in East Africa justify or attempt to challenge Afro-Pessimism in INGO communications and explain why this matters. Because these communications workers are frontline narrators of the development project, I argue that what they do and how they do it are key components of INGO communication that require serious scholarly attention.

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1 Introduction

This thesis explores how and why African communications employees of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) are at the centre of the perpetuation of Afro-pessimistic narratives. In doing so, I propose a reconceptualization of Afro-pessimism not simply as something that ‘happens’ to Africa and her peoples but also as something Africans and INGOs actively contribute to. However, I argue that these contributions are largely a result of highly unequal and inequitable global news flows, the development sector’s fundraising imperatives, and socio-economic practices that privilege Western audiences as the primary targets of INGO communications. To demonstrate this, I explore the structures of INGOs’ governance and story production processes as well as how they not only impact agency among communications workers based in two East African countries, but also influence the perpetuation or challenging of Afro-pessimistic narratives.

This introduction is divided into four parts. The first introduces Afro-pessimism within the context of INGO communications. I then provide an overview of the five INGOs involved in this research before moving on to outline my research questions and briefly discussing the theoretical approaches used to explore them. The last section charts the thesis’ structure and the key arguments made in each chapter.

1.1 Afro-pessimism, INGOs and the Rise of the Localisation Agenda

Afro-pessimism has historically been understood as the notion inherent to narratives about the continent, that there is something backward and wrong with Africa and her people that can only be corrected by external- largely Western- intervention. As far back as the seventies, complaints of the ways in which Africa was framed by Western media had already been registered. Nobel Laurette Chinua Achebe for instance described the West's framing of Africa and Africans as "old prejudices" that were unwholesome "distortions and cheap mystifications" (Achebe, 1977:20). More recently, novelist, Chimamanda Adichie described Afro-pessimism as a case of making a single story the only story, thereby removing all manner of nuance and specificity from stories about the continent.

> The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes. There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo. And depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe. And it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them. I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar (Adichie, 2009)

More recent examinations of Afro-pessimism, while clarifying its attributes and implications, have also tended to conceptualise it as something that happens to Africa and Africans. That is, something that Africans are subjected to by external actors such as Western media, politicians and INGOs.

However, recent analyses of African news media concluded that they too were as susceptible to Afro-pessimistic frames as their Western counterparts (Roberts and van Houten, 2021; Wahutu, 2018a). Africans, it appeared, are also guilty of the single-story narrative. The research explained that this was largely due to financial constraints as most African media did not have the resources required to employ or deploy reporters across the continent. They therefore relied largely on news agencies for coverage of regions other than the ones they were based in. But because Western agencies dominate the sector, even in Africa and have done so for decades (Paterson, 2011), African media ended up reproducing the news frames and narratives seen in Western media.

This is vital to point out because it appears to support the claims that Africa is “a social construct” based largely on stereotypes perpetuated by media logics of production (Nothias, 2020:266; Mudimbe, 1988) that decentre African perspectives and in favour of Western ones (Ezeru, 2021; Pailey, 2020; Nothias, 2016a; Harth, 2012; Musila, 2008). In this case, even African media was found to be reporting about Africa through Western lenses.

Another perspective from which to understand Afro-pessimism and adopted in this thesis is that of extraversion. In development studies, extraversion refers to a group or person that is in a dependent relationship with another, finding ways of exploiting their otherwise unfavourable position to appropriate power and resources (Hagmann, 2016; Peiffer and Englebert, 2012). Studies have shown that African states, institutions and politicians have for years found ways of exploiting their dependent relationship with the West to access financial and political support. From Uganda’s Museveni and his exploitation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to similar strategies employed by Somalian politicians, Afro-pessimistic narratives have been used as potent means of mobilising power and resources (Hagmann, 2016; Bayart and Ellis, 2000).

It is worth pointing out that the intersectionality of the media-both African and Western-politics and INGOs in as far as Afro-pessimism is concerned. Most scholars have tended to point at all or a combination of these sectors as responsible for perpetuating negative narratives about the continent. Indeed, some of the most recognisable images of Africa to the world include those of the 1984 Ethiopian famine, immortalised by the USA for Africa song, *We Are the World* and documented by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC’s) Michael Buerk and renowned African photojournalist, Mohamed Amin. However, as has been pointed out, the only way Buerk and Amin were able to get those images was through collaborating with Oxfam, one of the biggest INGOs in the world (Franks, 2013:20).

The relationships between INGOs and the media have since become an area of extensive scholarship in communication and media studies. Investigating the ways in which INGOs engage the media to achieve their promotional goals, some researchers have concluded that there is a co-dependency between the two, resulting from the limitations each faces in achieving their objectives. Mainstream media- particularly newspapers- have experienced ever-reducing revenue, forcing them to cut budgets on newsgathering. On the other hand, INGOs too have grown heavily dependent on mainstream media to not only inform the general public about the humanitarian crises these organisations respond to but also raise funds for their work.

These challenges however create opportunities for collaboration (Powers, 2015, 2014). INGOs facilitate the media's access to humanitarian stories they would otherwise be unable to get either because the cost of documenting them would be too costly or the process of doing so would involve political and logistical red tape. In turn, the media provide INGOs with the kind of visibility and platform they need to fundraise from the public as well as engage in political and public advocacy (Orgad, 2017, 2015; Orgad and Seu, 2014b).

This co-dependency has raised a lot of concern about the erosion of traditional media's independence and its tendency to uncritically accept INGO narratives and communication material as fact (Scott et al., 2018; Wright, 2015). Conversely, it has been pointed out that this collaboration with the media has meant that INGOs are often quick to adopt a simplistic media logic that sacrifices nuance and details of the histories, causes and contexts of humanitarian crises in Africa at the altar of promotional and fundraising goals (Powers, 2018; Ossewaarde et al., 2008). Ultimately, if, as many researchers have asserted, Africa's media image suffers from Afro-pessimistic narratives, this INGO-media relationship perpetuates it.

Separate from the continent's media image, international development itself has been the subject of intense debate with most scholars agreeing that the sector is dominated by Western perspectives imposed on the global South as normative. This tendency to view and measure everything against Western standards and as such, always finding those of the global South insufficient or regressive is known as the 'white gaze' (Koch, 2020; Pailey, 2020:733). In response to it, calls have for decades been made to de-colonise, reclaim and localise international development. Over the past five years, a series of global events have highlighted these calls even further.

In early February of 2018, *The Times* and *Mail on Sunday* broke stories about sexual exploitation by leaders of two of the biggest INGOs in the world, Oxfam and Save the Children. Although the incidents had happened several years prior (2011 for Oxfam and 2012/15 for Save the Children) and had been widely known within the international development sector, they had gone unreported by mainstream media (Cooper, 2021). In a sector-wide scandal that was later to be dubbed #AidToo, several other INGOs, including Medicins Sans Frontieres, World Vision UK and even the UN were accused of similar practices. These revelations came off the back of the #MeToo movement in which women across several sectors brought attention to the various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation they faced in male-dominated spaces.

A running theme in both #MeToo and #AidToo was the imbalance of power. In the case of the latter, local actors as well as beneficiaries were often too vulnerable and lacked the agency to speak up or hold those with power- often Western expatriates- to account (Cooper, 2021). This, despite decades-long calls both from within and outside the aid sector to localise development.

"Localisation" refers to the handing over of more decision-making power and resources by international organisations to local actors in the development sector (Roll and Kornprobst, 2021). Championed by the United Nations as far back as 1991 and more recently by the World Bank and USAID, it has been a buzz word in international development for decades

(Roepstorff, 2020) even though a 2015 report by Global Humanitarian Assistance showed that local actors were given only 0.2% of humanitarian funds (Swithern et al., 2015).

Localisation however means more than allocating resources and agency to local actors. It also means an acknowledgement of the important roles they play as frontline workers in international development. In other words, localisation can be understood "as the journey towards an end-goal of locally led practice" (Baguios et al., 2021:9).

But who exactly are local actors? As Roepstorff (2020) has argued, while the term is highly contested, most discourse on the local erroneously conceives it to be in binary opposition to the international, thereby creating grey areas or actors. One such group of actors are the African communications staffers of INGOs that are based in their countries or regions.

Recruited from the communities or countries receiving aid and often times by locally registered branches of INGOs, these communications workers are primary contributors and often originators of the stories, photographs and videos INGOs use to engage Western audiences for advocacy and fundraising purposes. Even in the increasingly rare cases that INGOs deploy media teams from their Western offices, locally based communications workers play key roles as intermediaries, interpreters, guides and hosts to their Western counterparts.

At national level, locally-based INGO communications workers also engage in advocacy and promotional activities with the media, the public and other stakeholders. Much like their Western counterparts, they collaborate with and facilitate journalists' coverage of events and activities organised or financed by the INGOs they work for. Recognising this intersection of the local and international, Barbelet (2019) proposes that such groups be categorised as local, even if they work for international organisations. This of course raises further questions around the conceptualisation of locals. Two that are relevant to this thesis relate to current understanding of INGO communication and I will discuss them briefly.

Whereas communications efforts by INGOs and other players within the development sector have been the focus of media and communications research for decades, the existence of INGO communications as a sub-sector is mostly inferred or assumed. Matthew Powers for instance observes that “humanitarian and human rights NGOs conduct a range of information functions, spanning the domains of fund-raising, impartial reporting and advocacy” but refers to these efforts as ‘publicity strategies’ (Powers, 2014:95). INGOs’ role as news makers and producers is also a growing area of research with the intersectionality of journalism and humanitarianism raising questions about the independence of journalism (Onyebadi and Alajmi, 2021; Kothari, 2018; Scott et al., 2018; Wright, 2018, 2017, 2015; Dirbaba, 2010; Fenton, 2010; Abbott, 2009; Kasoma, 2009; Cottle and Nolan, 2007) as well as the effect media logic has on INGOs’ communication efforts (Powers, 2017; Van Leuven et al., 2013; Zuckerman, 2010; Nolan and Cottle, 2009). There has also been some study and definition of humanitarian communication (see for instance Chouliaraki and Vestergaard, 2021; Orgad and Seu, 2014a).

In practice however, these distinctions are artificial. INGOs simultaneously engage in humanitarian communication, INGO advocacy and fundraising communication as well as the documentation and communication of regular international development programming. Moreover, for the most part, the communication material used for each of these is sourced by the same people; INGO communications workers based in the global South. In this thesis, I not only provide some clarity on the various strands of INGO communication, but also do so from the perspective of communication workers within the sector that are based at the frontline of development work.

When scholars conceptualise INGO communications two assumptions are often made. First, INGO are conceived as homogenous global entities and that what organisational spokespersons in the West say to the media or public is representative of the entire organisation. The second is the tendency to think of INGOs' production of promotional material and creation of news content as two separate processes.

In this thesis, I argue that both assumptions are erroneous. Far from being heterogenous, various national offices of INGOs tend to have different policies, approaches and outlooks. These are in part, a result of the communities they work in, the government policies they have to abide by and the strategic directions determined by their national leadership. Internal contestations and tensions are very often the norm rather than the exception.

Similarly, while it is true that INGOs' Western offices separately pursue promotional goals under fundraising departments and news opportunities under media departments, I argue that both depend on the same source of content and information; locally-based INGO communications workers.

1.2 Profiles of the Five INGOs

This research centres around the organisational structures and communication production processes of five INGOs with a presence in at least one of two East African countries; Uganda and Kenya. They are Action Aid, Christian Aid, Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision. Although a detailed description of the scope and inclusion process for the project is provided in Chapter 5, this section gives an overview of each of the organisations studied.

Action Aid

Founded in 1972 in the UK to sponsor poor children and communities in Kenya and India, Action Aid (AA) is currently a federal INGO headquartered in South Africa and with operations in over 40 countries, mostly in Asia and Africa (Action Aid, 2020). The organisation's work focuses on developing local communities' capacity to exercise their civil and human rights as well as tackle root causes of poverty and address humanitarian needs. In

2016, over 37% of its £229m annual budget was spent on programmes in Africa with East Africa taking the lion's share (38%) of it (Action Aid, 2017). In the region, Action Aid has offices in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda.

Christian Aid

Christian Aid (CA) was founded by a collection of Churches in the UK in 1945 to help refugees after the Second World War (Christian Aid, 2018). Since then, it has grown into a network of British and Irish Churches supporting humanitarian and development programmes mainly in Africa and Asia. Almost 60% of its 2016 budget was spent on programmes in Africa, with East Africa taking up 16.4% of the budget (Christian Aid, 2017). Christian Aid currently has field offices in only two East African countries; Kenya and South Sudan.

Plan International

Founded in 1937 in the United Kingdom, Plan International (PI) works in 76 countries to advance the rights of children and girl empowerment (Plan-International, 2019). 36% of the organisation's 2017 global budget was spent on programmes in Africa as compared to 21% in Asia and 11% in Central and South America. 54.6 % of the Africa budget was spent in East and Central Africa (Plan-International, 2018). Plan International is headquartered in Woking, United Kingdom. In East Africa, it has field offices in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and South Sudan and Tanzania.

Save the Children

Save the Children (StC) describes itself as the world's leading INGO for children, consisting of 29 member organisations that work in 120 countries to deliver change for vulnerable children (Save the Children, 2015a). The organisation employs over 25,000 staff worldwide and in 2015, had a revenue of 2.1 billion dollars, 13% of which was spent on fundraising and marketing. They too spent the largest part of their budget-41%- on Africa programmes with

20% of that allocated to East Africa (Save the Children, 2015b). The organisation has its headquarters based in London, UK. Save the Children too has operations in all six East African countries.

World Vision

World Vision (WV) is a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice (World-Vision, 2018). The organisation employs over 45,000 people working in 'nearly 100 countries' and had a total budget of 2.4 billion dollars in 2014 (World Vision, 2014). A significant portion of this- 47.9% is spent on programmes in Africa (World Vision, 2017b). By this account alone, World Vision is one of the largest INGOs operating in the region and only one of two among the five sampled with operations in all the six East African countries; Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. Although originally established in the US, World Vision's headquarters are currently in the Milton Keynes, United Kingdom.

1.3 Research Aims

This thesis seeks to answer three research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the organisational structures, processes and practices through which INGOs produce stories about their work in East Africa?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do these organisational structures, processes and practices affect the distribution of power between INGO Communication staffers based in East Africa and the West?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): To what extent and in what ways do the organisational structures, practices and workers' role perceptions reproduce Afro-pessimism in INGO communication?

These questions not only call attention to the centrality of locally based African communications workers in INGOs but explore whether, how and why they contribute to the creation of Afro-pessimistic narratives. The research questions are explored both theoretically in Chapters 3 and 4 as well as empirically in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Methodologically, this research combines several qualitative approaches, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, textual analysis and my prior professional experience in INGO communications. Although a detailed discussion and description of these methodologies is included in Chapter 5, there are two critical contributions this research makes that are worth pointing out here. First, this research takes an ethnographic approach to the study of INGO communication as it happens at the site of origin. In doing so, I directly engage with "the processes of moral reasoning and striving" engaged in by INGO communications workers in East Africa (Ong, 2019:494). Observing and making sense of the everyday practices of these frontline workers draws parallels to work done by Wahutu (2018a) on African journalists in the sense that it contributes to the proper framing of African actors as meaningful and consequential actors in INGO story production processes. It also allows for nuanced discussion of "the messy and fertile terrains of human experience that philosophical thought experiments bracket out" (Ong, 2019:483).

Theoretically, this project mainly relies on four academic traditions; postcolonial studies, moral economy theory, and a combination of two concepts of media studies; mediatisation and promotional culture. Postcolonial studies focuses on the legacy of the colonial era in contemporary society, providing critical, historical context to challenges the world currently seeks to resolve (Ahluwalia, 2012; Quayson, 2000; Shome, 1998). This is particularly helpful for international development where, as discussed above, global political and knowledge hierarchies and hegemonies are as much in contestation now as any other time in modern history (Sakue-Collins, 2020; Six, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988).

Moral economy theory too is helpful in linking the economic motivations and benefits informing the moral choices of those involved in INGO story production processes (Carrier, 2018; Friberg, 2015; Friberg and Götz, 2015; Kimambo and Hyden, 2008). It deals with values are produced, calculated, circulated and confronted in relation to social events (Fassin, 2020). To fully engage with INGO communication and its contribution to Afro-pessimism, I also apply principles of mediatisation and promotional culture to the study. Both are sub-fields of media studies and emanate from the general sense that society is increasingly becoming dependent on media and media logics. Just as globalisation has led to the world being interconnected and interdependent in ways that are both positive and problematic, this media dependency raises several opportunities and threats to INGO communication.

Ultimately, this research is aimed at making three contributions to media studies. At a theoretical level, I seek to link current understandings of Afro-pessimism to previously demonstrated extraversion methods. Specifically, I intend to demonstrate that Afro-pessimistic narratives, while damaging to Africa's media image, are also powerful tools of mobilising resources and attention. And because the aid sector is almost entirely dependent on fundraising and advocacy efforts in the West, Afro-pessimism is an integral part of the organisational and promotional strategies employed by INGOs. Viewing it as a form of extraversion would help explain its continued presence in the sector's narratives about Africa despite significant opposition to it both within and externally.

Methodologically, this project aims to problematise current understandings of INGOs as well as INGO communication. The specific contribution here is a demonstration of the heterogeneity of individual INGOs at the institutional level and the importance of nuanced conceptualisations when discussing them. I argue that while many INGOs are conceived as Western entities, their African offices are in reality locally-registered institutions with varying amounts of autonomy and agency. Recognising and understanding this autonomy and how it is used by local players is an often-overlooked important aspect of research in the aid sector.

Finally, I aim to provide empirical evidence of both my theoretical and methodological assertions as well as the establishing primacy of African, locally based communications workers in the production of materials used for INGO promotional and advocacy activities in the West.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis has nine chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction and provides an overview of the research scope, approach, aims and methodology. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide the theoretical framework and context of the research. Chapter 5 discusses the project's methodology while chapters 6,7 and 8 are empirical analyses of the data collected and observed. Chapter 9 is the thesis' conclusion.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the key arguments and conceptualisations about Afro-pessimism. I discuss the various definitions of the term, the historical context from which it emerged as well as more recent observations and criticisms of its use, particularly in regard to Western media's coverage of the continent. Crucially, I argue for an expansion in the conceptualisation of the term to accommodate the use of Afro-pessimism as an extraversion strategy by African countries and individuals as well as INGOs working there.

Chapter 3 builds on this understanding by offering a postcolonial overview of the history of international development, underpinning the key arguments around (Western) benefactors' intent in initiating it and (global South) beneficiaries' agency in its implementation. I also discuss the contradictions between the aspirational, theoretical definitions of INGOs and their operational realities. The lack of conceptual clarity around INGOs, I argue, presents blind spots in the analysis of these institutions' inter and intra organisational distributions of power and agency. The overall argument here is that the aid sector generally and INGOs specifically, perpetuate an imbalance of power in favour of the West even while committing in principle to calls for localisation and more agency to the global South.

Chapter 4 explains why this mismatch exists, demonstrating that due to the adoption of mediatisation and the adoption of a media logic that perpetuates Afro-pessimism, INGO communication practice continues to fall short of the sector's stated ideals. I argue for the adoption of moral economy theory as the best way to study and understand why Afro-pessimism continues within the sector even in the face of postcolonial reflexivity.

Chapter 5 introduces my research questions, methodological approach, ethical and positionality considerations. I lay out the scope and limits of the project's sites of data collection as well as how each of the organisations included in the research got to be considered and selected. I also include a reflection on the various ways in which my prior experience as a communications worker in the sector both aided and challenged my research.

Chapter 6 is the first of my empirical chapters and maps out the five INGOs' organisational structures at global, regional and national levels. I demonstrate that although some INGOs have federalised governance structures that cede decision-making power to national offices in the global South, their communication functions remain largely responsive to the needs and agenda of resource mobilising offices in the West.

In Chapter 7, I turn the focus squarely on the practical realities of INGO communications in East Africa, analysing how communications workers in two of the organisations work with the media and make sense of the grey areas of their collaboration. This discussion leads to reflections on methods of extraversion within the sector and comparisons of approaches between INGO communication workers based in the global South and their Western colleagues.

Chapter 8 is the last empirical chapter and focuses on communication workers' perception of Afro-pessimism, its presence in the sector and how they perceive themselves as either challenging or perpetuating it. Because women form a dominant part of INGO communications, I discuss some of the gender and nationality related challenges and opportunities they experience. Observing that the fundraising modes and imperatives far outweigh any other dynamics within the subsector, I conclude that Afro-pessimism within INGO communication is largely a result of an almost absolute focus on fulfilling (Western) donor demands and expectations.

Finally, Chapter 9 presents an overall analysis of my findings, directly engaging with the research questions introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed in Chapter 5. I discuss the limitations of my project, the opportunities it presents for further research and conclude with a reflection of my key contributions to the field.

2 Western Media, INGOs and Afro-Pessimism in Africa's Image in the West

2.1 Introduction

The story told of Africa to Western audiences has been the subject of much academic debate. The long-held view has been that the continent's image has been short-changed by simplistic, highly racialized and patronising narratives (Ezeru, 2021; Monson, 2017; Anyangwe, 2016; Scott, 2015; Bunce, 2014; Ahluwalia, 2012; Badru, 2012; Gumede, 2010; Franks, 2005; Brookes, 1995; Bayart, 1993; Achebe, 1977). This has given rise to scholarship on Africa's media image that has focused considerable attention on Afro-pessimism: the notion that the continent and her peoples are subjected to negative, stereotypical, racialised and essentialised narratives by mostly Western media industries. More recent scholarship, however, has raised critical questions about the lack of empirical evidence to back up claims of Afro-pessimism's prevalence, with an increasing number of researchers calling for more evidence, nuance and specificity when it comes to conceptualising and measuring Afro-pessimism.

Separately, empirical studies show that African players such as governments and civil society organisations not only contribute to specific negative media narratives about the continent but in some cases even initiate them as a means of gaining agency or leverage in their dealings with the West. According to this line of research, African institutions are able to easily tap into donor funding by adopting simplistic, negative but familiar and widely-embraced Western narratives about the continent and her people. This phenomenon has been referred to as extraversion (Hagmann, 2016; Peiffer and Englebert, 2012; Bayart and Ellis, 2000).

This chapter seeks to link these two growing bodies of research by reconceptualising Afro-pessimism. Rather than thinking of it simply as a mainly Western perspective of the African continent or focusing on determining the extent of its existence, I argue that Afro-pessimistic narratives are as much a product of extraversion strategies by African institutions as they are Western constructs. In other words, these simplistic, negative narratives are not merely the preserve of the West, but also a tool with which agency and power are renegotiated in the highly unequal world of international development. I further argue that adopting this perspective allows for a better understanding and study of why negative, stereotypical and essentialised narratives about Africa persist, the various players involved in their perpetuation, and the moral logic behind it all.

2.2 Defining Afro-Pessimism

Despite its relatively widespread use in African studies, Afro-pessimism has been a notoriously difficult term to define (Hellmann, 2020; Nwachukwu and Ogundiwin, 2020; Douglas, 2019; Bassil, 2011; de B'béri and Louw, 2011; Schorr, 2011a). This is because Afro-pessimism has been used in and for various, often contradictory, ways and purposes. This section engages with the initial definitions of the term as it relates to Western media, INGOs and scholarship as the primary purveyors of negative narratives about Africa. I then highlight the recent shift among scholars towards more nuanced perspectives that take into consideration Africans' participation and self-interest in the perpetuation of these negative narratives as well as the varying ways Afro-pessimism affects different African countries. Finally, I propose an application of this nuanced perspective to the study of INGO communication as a necessary prerequisite to understanding why, despite considerable criticism from outsiders and internal self-reflection, the sector continues to produce stories and narratives that promote, legitimize and/or perpetuate Afro-pessimism.

2.2.1 Historical Context

Although the term Afro-pessimism was not widely used prior to the early 2000s, the sentiment that Africa was being portrayed as a backward, disease-riddled and underdeveloped place has very much been at the centre of early African studies as an academic field for the better part of the last century. These studies ranged from critical reviews of the image of Africa in fictional literature, including Achebe (1977) and Curtin (1965), to post-colonial media narratives and information flow imbalances (Shivji, 2007; Ojo, 2002; Said, 1993). From this perspective, Afro-pessimism is viewed mainly as a continuation of colonial narratives that have perpetuated the notion that "something is wrong with Africans" (de B'béri and Louw, 2011:337). In examining the literature on Afro-pessimism, de B'béri and Louw (2011:336) identify four main theses that emerge from it:

a) That Africa is misrepresented by racists
b) That Africa is misrepresented by Western media
c) That Africa is in trouble, but can be fixed
d) That Africa is hopeless and cannot be fixed

These characterisations of Afro-pessimism presume an outsider perspective of the continent and, as such, early scholarship largely blamed hegemonic Western media and political systems that privileged racist, colonial constructs of Africa in Western media over more nuanced and inclusive narratives. Thus, Afro-pessimism can be conceptualised as a combination of "practices of representation that have produced Africa as a naturalised pessimistic object of knowledge" (de B'béri and Louw, 2011:345).

The key here is that Afro-pessimism is generally construed as an external perception of Africa or 'gaze' by outsiders, particularly non-African media (Deridder et al., 2020; Mulwo et al., 2012). As Schorr (2011a:28) puts it, a major characteristic of Afro-pessimism "is the role of the modern Western mass media as its primary vector of continuation". Journalistic essays such as those by Kaplan (1994) and more recently, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (2016,2002), that use simplistic but evocative language when describing Africa, are often singled out as examples of Western media's projection of the continent. Kaplan for instance describes an African health minister's eyes as being "like egg yolks, an aftereffect of some of the many illnesses, malaria especially, endemic in his country". For his part, Boris Johnson referred to black people as "piccaninnies" with "watermelon smiles" and attempted to justify colonialism, asserting that Africa's problem is "not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more"(Johnson, 2016, 2002). Schorr (2011a:28) concluded that Kaplan's article was "riddled with gross generalizations and Afro-pessimistic statements" while Połońska-Kimunguyi and Kimunguyi (2017:343) assert that "Johnson's language echoes the imperial vision and sees the continent as a 'problem'". Such rhetoric gives credence to earlier assessments such as that of Besteman (2005:11), who observed that Western media coverage of the continent and her peoples was markedly simplistic and tended to "reduce controversial issues to sound bites".

Building on the various tendencies of Afro-pessimism proposed by de B'béri and Louw (2011), Nothias (2012) proposes five key aspects of Afro-pessimism, especially as it relates to the media's coverage of Africa: essentialism, racialisation, selectivity, ranking framework, and prediction (2012:54). These characteristics are consistent with those proposed by de B'béri and Louw (2011), Ahluwalia (2000), Momoh (2003), Hunter-Gault (2006), and Schorr (2011a). These will be discussed further in the next section.

2.2.2 Key Assertions in Afro-pessimism Literature

From their coverage of the Ethiopian famine of 1985 to more recent reporting on the 2014 outbreak of Ebola in parts of West Africa, Western media has been found to be simplistic (Monson, 2017; Franks, 2013; Müller, 2013; Moeller, 1999; Clay, 1989), "biased and unbalanced" (Yusuf et al., 2015:2). In the case of Ebola, Western media conceptualised the disease as 'African' and regularly projected the whole continent of 54 countries as dealing with an outbreak that was only affecting a handful of West African countries (Monson, 2017:5). Others such as Paterson (1992) argued that instead of providing contextualized, in-depth information about events in Africa, most US television and newspaper coverage opted for dramatic, emotionally appealing but simplistic narratives. Brookes' analysis of stories published in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* in 1995 concluded that they largely projected Africans as "primitive, savage, murderous and violent" (Brookes, 1995:474). Paterson re-examined stories 25 years later, concluding that available evidence still "suggested an ongoing external image of Africa as undifferentiated, threatening, eminently exploitable and reliant on outsiders" (Paterson, 2016a:220).

Homogeneity is often interpreted not only in terms of the continent's geographical composition, but also in racial terms. Therefore, the second aspect of Afro-pessimism in the media that Nothias (2012) identified is the colour coding of the term 'African'. Western media, he argued, regularly use 'African' not as a signifier of "people living on the continent as a geographical entity" but "people who are black and live in Africa" (Nothias, 2012:55; Mudimbe, 1988). Although linking 'African' to blackness in and of itself would not necessarily lead to negative connotations, it effectively excludes other races from the narrative. By doing so, it removes them from the pessimistic outlook of the continent, creating an image of Africa in which poverty is equated to being black and any intervention/assistance given to alleviate it is presumed to be coming from a non-black West.

Furthermore, this racialized narrative aids in the understating of the West's involvement in and contribution to the problems being faced on the continent (Gumede, 2010). Thus, when Western media talk of 'tribal' conflicts or other such humanitarian disasters taking place in 'Africa', the picture that is painted is not only of one vast 'country' at war, but of black people as the perpetrators and helpless victims of these crises on the one hand and the white West coming to the rescue on the other (Bassil, 2011; Ojo, 2002).

Nothias (2012:55) argues that it is this racialised concept of Africa that led to the anti-government uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Libya – all African countries – being framed as an 'Arab Spring'. A similar racialised preconception of the continent can be seen in the term 'Sub-Saharan Africa' which, as one scholar put it, is an illogical term that "divides Africa according to white ideas of race, making North Africans white enough to be considered for their glories, but not really white enough (and) a way of saying 'Black Africa' and talking about black Africans without sounding overtly racist" (Mashanda, T.C in Haldevang, 2016).

Yet another aspect of Afro-pessimism in the image of Africa is the selective nature of Western media's coverage of Africa, both qualitatively and quantitatively (Nothias, 2012:56). This is perhaps the most critiqued aspect of Afro-pessimism and has been the focus of a relatively large amount of scholarship. Most analyses have concluded that when it comes to Western media coverage, Africa tends to receive significantly less coverage in proportion to its population (Von Naso, 2018; Bunce, 2016; Wu, 2004; El Zein and Cooper, 1992; Hawk, 1992a; Paterson, 1992). This trend is partly due to the fact that the West overwhelmingly dominates the knowledge production and media industry, with a handful of European and American legacy and new media companies holding sway over news about the rest of the world (Ngwu, 2018; Paterson, 2005).

As Paterson (2011) has argued, television news agencies tend to make editorial decisions on the basis of perceived interests of the richest broadcasters in the world, none of whom are based in Africa. Research also shows that of the little coverage Africa receives in Western media, an overwhelming amount of it is negative, focusing mostly on humanitarian disasters, civil unrest and other international development news (Bunce, 2016; Paterson, 2016a; Dogra, 2012; Keim, 2012; Schraeder and Endless, 1998).

To be clear, negative news in and of itself does not necessarily equate to Afro-pessimism. Indeed as Scott (2016) points out, talk of Africa's news coverage being 'negative' without substantiating the meaning of the word is problematic for two reasons. First the vagueness of the term allows researchers to link their works to previous ones even when their findings, methodology and interpretation of the word 'negative' are significantly different. Secondly, by consistently talking of 'negative' news about Africa, researchers are at risk of creating a red herring, perpetuating assumptions about news coverage of Africa without the requisite empirical evidence to back them up.

However, this negative news coverage of Africa is situated in a context that is unique to Africa; the highly unequal news flows that privilege and mainstream news by Western media outlets (Guo and Vargo, 2017; Bunce, 2015b) as well as a post-colonial world order that stereotypes, racializes and essentialises the continent (Nothias, 2012; Eko, 2007; Brookes, 1995). The combination of all these factors means that negative news, while not necessarily peculiar to Africa, feeds into knowledge systems that conflate the continent, her (black) people and historically negative assumptions, thereby perpetuating Afro-pessimism.

A significant aspect of this racialised representation of Africa is seen in the manner in which African sources have historically been used in media stories. It was for instance noted in the 1990s, that while Africans and African representatives were more frequently quoted in the sampled stories than Western sources (which included INGOs), quotes by African sources were almost always qualified through the use of terms such as 'alleged', 'claims' and 'denies' (Brookes, 1995:476). Because journalists are trained to qualify some sources and take others at face value, this tendency effectively achieves what the term 'sub-Saharan Africa' does: subtly and 'professionally' undermining African sources without appearing to be doing so along racial lines.

Nothias (2018:1154) comes to a similar conclusion after analysing 282 news articles in French and British newspapers. He notes that even when British media quoted African sources more than Western ones, "there was a subtle linguistic bias in that journalists systematically framed African voices as less assertive than Western ones". Therefore, far from providing context and clarity on complex issues, the African sources were used as backdrops to the narratives established by Western sources such as INGOs working in the area. Brooke's findings specifically demonstrated a consistently negative representation of Africa across the ideological divide that newspapers in the UK tend to have. Both the conservative *Daily Telegraph* and left-leaning *Guardian* were equally negative in their portrayal of Africa.

Nothias' fourth and fifth components of Afro-pessimism in Western media images of Africa are ethnocentric ranking and prediction. With the former, Africa's 'progress' tends to be measured by the extent to which African countries adhere to Western neo-liberalism. Championed in no small part by West-controlled financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, neoliberal policies such as the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and early 1990s formed the basis upon which African countries like Uganda and Kenya were deemed by the West to be 'developing' (Wiegratz, 2016; Nothias, 2012:57; Moyo, 2009; Duffield, 2002; VSO, 2002). From this perspective, Africa's failure to live up to the standards set by and measured against the West form the context within which the continent's progress is discussed. This forms the fifth component of prediction in which

Western media make damning or glorious assertions about the continent with the patronising confidence of colonial masters. From narratives such as Joseph Conrad's racist 'Heart of Darkness' to *The Economist*'s declarations – first of Africa being 'The hopeless continent' (Dowden, 2000) and then of 'Africa Rising' (The Economist, 2013) – all present the continent within the frame of Western expectations. And while it is true that the West extends the same lenses to places like Russia or even, to some extent, China, the critical difference in framing is the lack of acknowledgement of African agency. While China could be said to be communist or Russia socialist, African countries are quite simply either failing to live up to the West's standards or making baby steps towards them.

This section has drawn on five components of Afro-pessimism proposed by Nothias (2012) to discuss the specific aspects of the term as used by scholars. More recently, however, there has been a growing re-examination of Afro-pessimism that takes into account Africans' role in not only perpetuating but also justifying its existence. The next section engages with these nuanced positions.

2.3 Afro-pessimism and Post-colonial Reflexivity in the Media

Researchers have long argued that Western media play a critical role in constructing, interpreting and transmitting the conditions of distant others to Western audiences (Wright, 2018; Chouliaraki, 2013; Franks, 2013). Newspapers have particularly been crucial in providing detailed narratives of Africa to the West and influencing Western governments' policies towards it (Greenslade, 2011; Galtung and Ruge, 1964). A 2007 survey found 47 per cent of the British population sought to be informed about the continent by reading newspapers and magazines (Lader, 2007). For his part, Greenslade noted that although there has been a consistent decline in newspaper sales, "broadcasters and bloggers tend to respond to the stimulus of a news and comment schedule that originates in newspapers" (Greenslade, 2011). A much earlier study of the media's representation of distant violence noted that "the press had a very significant role in informing attitudes and responses in British Society" (Shaw, 1996:179).

More recently, Khabaz (2018) points to the media, particularly national newspapers in the UK, as having been responsible for 'political socialisation': the repetitive exposure of the public by the media to specific messages that result in the adoption of specific political frames. Firmstone (2019) also noted that politicians often look to newspaper editorials and journalists' perspectives and even contact them about the same, in part because they perceive media narratives as strong indicators of public opinion. When applied to Afro-pessimism, researchers often point to the same kind of media influence as being responsible for the perpetuation of negative, stereotypical narratives about Africa.

But newspapers are not the only mass medium accused of sustaining Afro-pessimism. Franks (2013) for instance asserts that television has been crucial in mobilizing financial support for humanitarian action by Western INGOs as well as contributing to racialized, essentialised and simplistic narratives about Africa. Pointing to the television coverage of the 1985 Ethiopian famine, she demonstrates that it was the heart-wrenching television images of starving children and dead animals that dramatically swayed both public and political attention towards the crises. Earlier, Shaw (1996) also argued that television narratives were at the centre of the creation of images of war and the dissemination of basic information to the vast number of people.

Even among journalists – who are often the prime suspects of Afro-pessimism within the media – there does appear to be recognition that Western media narratives about Africa lack the kind of nuance and specificity used in reporting on the West. Consider, for instance, these reflections by a BBC foreign correspondent on the coverage of Africa by Western media (himself included):

> Since the end of colonialism, Western correspondents have stood in front of emaciated Africans or piles of African bodies and used the language of the Old Testament to mediate the horrors to their audiences. That practice began four decades ago, and the template hasn't changed all that much. For example, no piece from an African disaster zone is complete without the sound bite from a white angel of mercy from one aid agency or another. In doing this, we convince ourselves this helps folks back home "relate" to the stories we are sending them. Rarely do TV journalists pause to contemplate the consequences of this color-coded compassion. Viewers at home are watching (usually) a white reporter and white aid worker, and beyond them almost as backdrops are the wretched African masses. Just as it's always been and always will be, they think. Thank goodness for our brave reporters and aid workers. (Keane, 2004:9)

Keane's interpretation of the coded message in the news addresses the heart of Afro-pessimism in the media: the narrative as interpreted by the producers and recipients of the stories about the continent. Their interpretation of Africa is particularly important given the perceived centrality of newspapers in informing Western government and policymakers' perspectives on Africa.

2.3.1 Post-colonial Reflexivity in the Media

On the other hand, Kean's introspective observations indicate that (Western) journalists are aware of and responsive to criticism of their coverage of Africa. Nothias (2020) refers to this as post-colonial reflexivity: the willingness by journalists to engage and agree with the idea that Africa endures Afro-pessimistic narratives in the media. He argues that not only do journalists tend to agree with the critique that Africa is largely a social construct and "that media and culture play a role in sustaining a regime of representations based on stereotypes" (Nothias, 2020:266) but that they also (purport to) employ several strategies to counter or tamper the effect of these stereotypes. He identifies three particular strategies. The first is intra-media strategies or those that include personal interventions by the journalists while writing or in their interactions with editors. Secondly, journalists reported attempting to balance out Afro-pessimistic narratives in one story with more nuanced coverage in another. Nothias (2020) refers to this as inter-media strategies. The last strategy reported was at the extra-media level, that is, journalists turning to other means of communication such as blogging, vlogging or writing memoirs as a way of providing more nuanced coverage of Africa.

Nothias does not claim that postcolonial reflexivity negates charges of Afro-pessimism by Western media but suggests that his findings "challenge deterministic accounts of the production of racialized representations and complicate our understanding of international journalism" (Nothias, 2020:265). He notes that some of the remedial efforts employed by journalists potentially exacerbate the existing negative stereotypical narratives about Africa and serve as a way for journalists to rationalise and justify their "participation in representational othering" (Nothias, 2020:267).

An example of this is Stanley Meisler, a foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, who objected to criticism of his news stories on Africa. When students accused him of treating Africans with condescension, he replied, "I am not Africa's public relations man… That's not the job of a foreign correspondent" (Meisler, 1992:37). To him, avoiding language and story angles simply because they had the potential of perpetuating negative stereotypes about Africa was equivalent to trapping the journalism profession in sentiment, something he regarded as "foolish" (Meisler, 1992:27).

More recently, this line of defence by foreign correspondent was repeated when research found that a "correspondent would argue that the media deliver what the audience wants" and that "they are not responsible for how people interpret media content" (Nothias, 2016b:77). Another foreign correspondent noted that "journalists use 'reductive' definitions because they don't have the luxury of space" to explain the nuances and peculiarities of the various African contexts (Wrong, 2016:31). What the idea of postcolonial reflexivity demonstrates therefore are the complex, multi-layered levels of awareness of and responses by foreign correspondents and journalists to charges of Afro-pessimism in Africa's media image.

But Western journalists and media are not the only ones accused of Afro-pessimism. Their African counterparts have also been shown to contribute to the perpetuation of Afro-pessimism in three distinctive ways: reproducing Western news agencies' accounts of other parts of the continent; using pan-African narratives that negate or minimise nuance and difference; as well as adopting similar Western sources and styles of reporting news. The next section explains how each of these phenomena contribute to Afro-pessimism.

2.3.2 African Media as Perpetuators of Afro-Pessimism

There has been growing academic interest in local agency, with an increasing number of researchers re-examining groups of Africans and African institutions that have long been viewed mostly as victims or pawns in global media production and knowledge transfer imbalances. One group most relevant here are local news workers who, as mounting evidence suggests, are an integral yet often unnoticed part of news gathering and production for Western agencies and correspondents (Palmer, 2016; Aljazeera, 2015; Cohen, 2015; Murrell, 2014; Palmer and Fontan, 2007). Murrell (2011,2009) makes the conclusion that these workers – usually qualified journalists in their own right – often provide foreign correspondents with not just story ideas but interpretations of information gathered as well. If, as Ebron (2009) puts it, "Africa is often portrayed as a timeless story of tribal rivalries, intended to invoke in the minds of its spectators the pre-modern", then one must consider local news workers as accessories to this narrative.

This is particularly demonstrated in a study of African media coverage of Africa. When researching the ways that journalists in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda represented the conflict in Dafur, South Sudan, Wahutu (2018a) noted that African media used the ethnic conflict frame to describe the conflict, almost as much as their Western counterparts. He however points out that while Western media used this frame as a ‘casual signifier in explaining conflict in Africa’, African media tended to use it ‘to domesticate the news and to demarcate which actors should be understood as *Other* and whom audiences share an affinity with’ (Wahutu, 2018a:61).

More recently, a continent-wide study illustrated why Afro-pessimism must be reimagined to include Africans’ active participation in its creation. It revealed that up to a third of all stories about Africa in news outlets on the continent are sourced from foreign news services such as AFP and the BBC while up to 13 per cent of stories carried by African news outlets focused on negative themes such as political violence, civil unrest and armed conflict (Roberts and van Houten, 2021). Although the report was quick to point out that many media in Africa lack the resources to generate their own stories and also face an unequal distribution of media freedom (Roberts and van Houten, 2021:9), it nonetheless demonstrated that Afro-pessimism does not exist solely in Western media narratives and is also pervasive in African media.

Relatedly, Ogola (2015:23) goes even further and points out that even Pan-African media initiatives often find themselves using concepts and language that “generally delete nuance and contradiction in favour of simpler binaries” thereby negating their interventionist agenda. In an attempt to highlight the commonalities of the continent’s peoples, pan-African sentiments often downplay their historical, political, religious and socio-economic differences, adopting a vision of Africa that is, ironically, similar in its simplistic generalisation to that adopted by the West. Indeed the question of Africans’ “multiplicity of identities” (Cheruiyot and Uppal, 2019:259) has been one of the biggest challenges to pan-African ideology – and one that has yet to be satisfactorily addressed.

Thirdly, African journalists have tended to qualify African sources while taking Western ones at face value, in much the same way as Western journalists do. This is in part explained by the uncritical acceptance and adoption of Western ideas of journalism, or what Tuchman (1972:661) refers to as "strategic ritual". As an example, Kivikuru (2015:68) points to the "tightly packaged, space-saving inverted pyramid (which) is frequently used both in online reporting where it operates without any kind of volume constraints, and in African community media where it is not tied to any time or spatial pressures". Similarly, Jacobs (2015) argues that financial and political constraints often impose limitations on African journalism, resulting in a replication of Western stereotypical narratives and rendering the call for African journalists to tell the 'African story' moot.

Once again, the point here is that Afro-pessimism should not be conceptualised purely as something that happens to Africa(ns), but a complex phenomenon involving various actors, including Africans as active participants in its creation.

Thus far, I have mainly discussed journalists and news workers from both Africa and the West as major contributors to Afro-pessimistic narratives. I now turn to another related but distinct contributor to Africa's media image: International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). In the next section, I argue that the end of the Cold War, coupled with the push for socio-economic liberalisation on the African continent by Western governments and institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), created favourable conditions for INGOs to establish themselves as legitimate producers of knowledge about Africa. I further explain that the Ethiopian famine of 1984-5 and the influx of financial aid as a result of the media attention it received was a watershed moment for INGO story production, providing an institutional blueprint to them for how to communicate about Africa for purposes of resource mobilisation and advocacy.

2.3.3 INGOs as Contributors to Africa's Media Image

Although there were some INGOs working in Africa between 1950 and 1970 – when most of the continent achieved self-governance – their influence on news about Africa in Western media was limited (Manji and O'Coill, 2002; Dicklitch, 1998). Indeed, while foreign correspondents and local news workers have been a part of the media production process since the mid-19th century, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that INGO communications workers started becoming major contributors to Western media discourse about far off places.

Some scholars have noted that the increased involvement of INGOs in influencing news from abroad coincided with the end of the Cold War (Wright, 2018; Davies, 2014). This they explain was mostly due to "their ability to manoeuvre effectively within the transnational centres of power" (Wright, 2018:37) that were developing at the time, increasing their relevance and participation in international politics.[1] As the Cold War came to an end, the liberalisation of African economies and societies was on the rise. In most African states, previously untouchable dictators faced increasing internal and external pressure to accept IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes as the condition for much-needed financial aid (Wiegratz, 2016). As one scholar has noted, "In the face of these demands, authoritarian leaders legalized opposition parties, granted the press more freedom and allowed civil society groups limited access to official media outlets" (Eko, 2007:220). Another observed that "donors, lenders and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) joined in the struggle to impose political

[1] The extent of growth in INGOs' involvement in international politics is discussed at length in Chapter 4.

conditionalities that required a commitment to democracy and human rights in exchange for further support" (Ihonvbere, 1997:372).

Whether INGOs' increased political participation was a form of neo-colonialism or an inevitable part of the development process is a matter that has generated great debate (Moyo, 2009; Dossa, 2007; Crewe and Harrison, 2002). What is important to this research however – and almost universally acknowledged – is that it afforded INGOs increased legitimacy in the eyes of the Western Media, since they were now not mere advocates for change, but frontline actors in the development of Africa and therefore authoritative voices about its affairs (Dogra, 2012). Due to a combination of Western and African journalists' uncritical acceptance of Western sources' narratives, as discussed in the previous section, and African governments' notoriety for being corrupt, untruthful and unreliable (Soyinka-Airewele et al., 2010; Domatob, 1994), Western INGOs established themselves as legitimate tellers of truth (Stroup and Wong, 2016; Dogra, 2012).

Other scholars have pointed to economic incentives as having been the most influential causes of INGOs' rise as critical players in the formation of Africa's media image. Moyo (2009) and Burnell (1991) for instance have argued that after the colonial era, as INGOs began to work with the new African governments to address the development issues the continent faced, there was a growing need to have this interaction documented, largely for purposes of INGO resource mobilization in the West. The bulk of this work was initially outsourced to journalists or former journalists who would in turn capitalize on their media savviness and experience to get stories published or broadcast (Wright, 2015).

In the more recent past, however, INGOs have invested heavily in their communications departments, employing full-time personnel and state-of-the-art equipment (Powers, 2018). Communicating development issues to the public has also grown into a highly specialised skill, with INGOs now requiring their communications staffers to not only have significant experience in advocacy, public relations and journalism (Save the Children, 2016b; Davis, 2013; World Vision, 2012) but also expecting them to have development-specific university degrees in fields such as development communication, humanitarian communication and development journalism (Powers, 2018; Davis, 2013; Walker and Russ, 2010).

INGOs are almost single-handedly responsible for the development of an entire subsector of development communication. This consists of communication for development (C4D), Social and Behavioural Change Communication, as well as emergency or humanitarian communication (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018b; Manyozo, 2012; Mowlana and Wilson, 1987). As INGOs became more reliant on effective communication about their work and intentions both to (potential) donors and their beneficiaries, it was no longer enough to depend on a few ex-journalists and the goodwill of the media. Instead, INGOs are increasingly professionalising their story production processes and communicating their work to diverse audiences (Davis, 2013).

Additionally, there is a general consensus among most African studies scholars that the Ethiopian famine of 1984-5 marked a pivotal moment in INGOs' engagement with the media in regard to humanitarian crises and advocacy. Franks (2013) notes that the scale of international media coverage the famine received was unprecedented, as was the impact both in terms of fundraising efforts by INGOs and perceptions about the continent. While she points out that this was an exceptional period of Western coverage of Africa (rather than the norm), she observed the following long-term effects:

> For the donor nations the coverage of the famine brought about a change in consciousness and awareness of the developing world, affecting and reaching out far wider than these issues had ever penetrated before. It changed the nature of charitable appeals and began a whole new genre of charity fundraising. More unexpectedly, the media coverage surrounding the famine also acted as a catalyst for the transforming growth of Northern

> agencies as institutions. Their size and overall significance within civil society completely changed during this period and this was to a considerable extent precipitated by the reaction to the media reporting in Ethiopia. (Franks, 2013:170)

Following successful fundraising appeals for the Ethiopian famine – particularly in the UK – aid agencies began to aggressively and consistently pursue simplistic, depoliticized and often decontextualized media narratives about humanitarian crises in Africa (Franks, 2013; Dogra, 2012). The justification for such messaging ranged from evidence that such messages were easy to understand to how they fit into the journalistic norms of newsworthiness, thereby increasing the chances of being picked up by the media (Powers, 2018; Franks, 2013).

This successful fundraising, as well as the professionalisation of their communication departments, meant that INGOs became so invested in this method of advocacy and fundraising that the likelihood of changing it was significantly limited. Powers (2018:109) refers to this as reinforcing path dependencies.

Path dependence generally studies institutions' internal ability to reproduce or sustain themselves. The general consensus among theorists is that once institutions are founded, they operate and make decisions that make it more likely than not that continuity will be chosen over change (Sydow et al., 2020; Page, 2006; Pierson, 2000). Powers (2018) argues that in spite of technological advancements and the professionalisation of their communications, INGOs "continue to place a premium on mainstream media coverage", thereby limiting their ability to challenge some of the shortcomings of news – such as its tendency to use the inverted pyramid model, as discussed in the previous section. Instead, INGOs end up uncritically adopting a media logic that, as discussed, perpetuates stereotypical narratives about Africa. He illustrates this as follows:

> Not only are these (INGO) publicity strategies centred on garnering news coverage, but they also take the media agenda as a given. Most NGO professionals I spoke with expressed an assumption that news media coverage was not something they could successfully

> challenge. A communications professional at Oxfam shrugged, unsurprised when I said that it seemed his organisation took media coverage as a given. “It’s kind of hard for us to tell the media, ‘Look, you’ve covered Afghanistan four times more than you’ve covered Somalia.’ They’ll say, ‘Yeah, so what?’ It’s kind of obvious. (Powers, 2018:125)

In using the term *reinforcing path dependency*, Powers (2018) makes the point that path dependencies in fields such as politics, philanthropy or media ultimately reinforce the path dependency actions in related fields such as INGOs.

Over 50 years have passed since Africa started becoming independent of its colonial rulers. In the wake of independence, there was a general sense of optimism and euphoria about the continent both among her populace and her former colonial rulers (Ahluwalia, 2012; Shome, 1998). The generally upbeat mood during the first years of independence is best captured in the dictum of Ghana’s president, Kwame Nkurumah; “Seek ye first the political kingdom and else shall be added unto you” (Biney, 2011:132). In the West, the continent was being covered extensively by the media with regular, informed and in-depth stories from locally-based correspondents getting published in mainstream broadsheet newspapers like *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail* (Franks, 2005). It has been argued that “the fact that newspapers and broadcasters had invested in correspondents meant that they were then inclined to take their material and the story was reported in a steady, incremental way – informed by locally-based expertise” (Franks, 2005:130).

By the early 1990s, not only had most of these Western media outlets abandoned the idea of locally-based correspondents, but the content of their stories had become decidedly negative, mainly focusing on disasters, conflicts and very little else (De Beer, 2010; Shaw, 1996; Hawk, 1992a). Some scholars have argued that this trend – the tendency to cover negative aspects of the periphery by media in the West – is a general phenomenon that applies as much to Asia as it does to Africa (Thussu, 2006).

However, given the continent's historical experiences of the slave trade, colonialism and racial prejudice, it is hardly contested that the extent to which negative stereotypes about Africa(ns) have been constructed in Western media is exceptional (Saidykhan, 2009; Golan, 2008; Achebe, 1977). Additionally, Africa is uniquely dependent on INGOs as a main political actor and driver of development. Dogra is right in referring to INGOs as 'representatives' of the Third World (Africa) to the West through what they say since "INGOs representations not only influence our understanding of the world, but they also have significant implications for the management of NGOs" (Dogra, 2014:2). Whether INGOs are willing to assume the responsibilities that come with this power is unclear.

The main arguments so far are threefold. First, the Ethiopian famine "was a key moment in transformations such as that in the relationship between the media and aid agencies…" (Franks, 2013:178). Specifically, there was a significant increase in INGOs' involvement in and contribution to shaping the West's knowledge production about Africa.

Secondly, the media increasingly became uncritically trusting of INGOs and their narratives, thereby publishing or broadcasting their versions of Africa without any effort to counter, contextualize or critique them. This led to a mutually beneficial relationship in which both the media and NGOs adopted what could be seen as strategic rituals, that is, uncritically taking INGOs' narratives as dependable on the one hand and uncritically adopting the media's logic on the other. For the media, this relationship resulted in privileged access to sites of humanitarian crises and emergencies while for INGOs the increased publicity translated into increased fundraising opportunities and brand visibility.

Lastly, this mutually beneficial relationship, along with the investments made on the part of INGOs to professionalise their communications capabilities and build strong ties with the media mean that INGOs are less likely to favour a change of their story production processes, even when they are evidently detrimental to the image of the peoples they seek to serve.

Having discussed the various contributors to stereotypical, negative, racialised and simplistic narratives about Africa, I now discuss some of the main objections to the notion that Africa receives particularly negative media coverage by the West on account of Afro-pessimism. The two debates most relevant to this research are arguments in justification of its existence and those questioning current knowledge and assumptions made about it. Each of these perspectives is discussed below.

2.4 Afro-Pessimism Questioned

Several socio-economic and political realities of Africa are indisputably grim in both comparative and relative terms. Even before *The Economist* infamously dubbed Africa the "hopeless continent" (Dowden, 2000), a damning outlook on the continent had been offered, pushing back against those who were advocating for more positive narratives.

> The bitter truth is that Africa is not prepared for the world market; it cannot compete, and if it is forced to do so it will not do so successfully. And yet, in the name of a purblind optimism, that is what its friends are urging it to do… For Africa is weak. There is nothing to be gained and much to be lost by pretending otherwise, or even that it has the potential to become stronger soon. Indeed, in a world in which information technology is creating an even greater gulf between haves and have nots, Africa's technological underdevelopment – a gap that grows more and more difficult and expensive to bridge every year – may be the greatest obstacle of all. (Rieff, 1998:17)

His conclusion was further predicated on arguing that Africa is an insignificant player in the world market, "marginal to the geostrategic concerns of most important rich countries, and marginal to the economic concerns of most multinational corporations except those engaged in oil extraction or mining" (Rieff, 1998:21). As such, he argued, attempts to sugar-coat the dire situation of the continent only succeeded in avoiding the hard, honest and practical conversations that needed to be had as a starting point to finding a solution. For Rieff (1998:10) Afro-pessimism "was all too amply grounded in Africa's postcolonial realities". Pointing to data collected between 1960 and 1980, he demonstrated that most of Africa's states became poorer than they were before independence. This, he argued, coupled with civil unrest in many parts of the continent, stagnated life expectancy, educational enrolment and healthcare indicators, thereby justifying the pessimistic view the West took of the continent.

Rather than conceptualise it as a simplistic Western media view of Africa, Rieff (1998) appeared to understand Afro-pessimistic narratives primarily as indicators of larger problems: global imbalances of power, excesses of capitalism and globalisation coupled with the institutional failures of many African states. Because of these challenges, Rieff argued that Africa's condition was such that it simply had no chance of ever competing in the global market without radical change. "To make the claim that there is more reason to be an Afro-pessimist than to believe in the promise of an African renaissance", he added, "is not the same thing as saying that there is nothing to be done" (Rieff, 1998:21). His proposed way forward, however, focused on Western intervention through increased international aid, economic protections and debt relief. If there was to be any remedy to Africa's bleak prospects, Rieff was convinced that it would have to start with scholars and politicians alike admitting that there was more reason to worry than to be hopeful about Africa. Rieff's framing of Africa's problems captured all the five aspects of Afro-pessimism as suggested by Nothias (2012). While he raised legitimate questions about the continent's ability to favourably compete in the global economy, he appears to have underestimated Africa's centrality in the global economy and politics. In the same year that his thoughts were published, the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed, killing over 220 people, with over 4,000 injured (Davis, 2012). Three years later, the September 11 bombings formerly ushered in America's 'War on Terror' in which many

African countries have since played key roles both as allies – Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Djibouti for instance – as well as training grounds for those opposed to America – Libya, Sudan, Nigeria and Somalia being the most notable (Mills, 2016). These developments were just a few of many that demonstrated Africa's connectedness to the West as well as its strategic importance geopolitically.

Rieff however appeared to accurately highlight the underlying power imbalances in international relations that help sustain Afro-pessimism. Africa's contributions to the world economy and global politics are not on a par with whatever benefits it reaps from it. The continent has the largest amount of natural mineral deposits (Sharaky, 2014) and has historically been the main source of raw materials for the global West's industrialisation (Carmody, 2017). From producing two-thirds of the world's cocoa (Ryan, 2019) to supplying over 80 percent of the world's coltan to multinationals like Microsoft and Apple (Deshmukh, 2019; Mann, 2017), African countries are at the heart of global trade. And yet, trade barriers in Western economies coupled with European Union and US subsidies ensure that Africa's access to Western markets is only viable when contributing raw materials. Western economies' access to Africa, on the other hand, is largely unfettered (Labonte, 2004). The result is institutionalised economic hierarchies that have Africa at the bottom of the food chain, even while contributing significantly to world trade. This predicament is no different from 30 years ago, when Walter Rodney pointed to a combination of "imperialism and the various processes that bolstered colonialism" as having created "impenetrable, structural blockades to economic, and thus also, political and social progress on the continent" (Rodney, 2018:33).

Relatedly, there have been, in the past decade, several high-profile pushbacks and counternarratives on Afro-pessimistic frames of Africa. In the aftermath of Invisible Children's sensational Kony2012, there was a media backlash against the documentary and its claims, with many pointing out its factual inaccuracies (Brown et al., 2012; Kagumire, 2012) as well as its white saviour undertones (Nothias, 2013; Basu, 2012; Cole, 2012). In 2013, Kenyans took to Twitter to mock and protest CNN's reference to the country as a "hotbed of terror" (Nothias and Cheruiyot, 2019:138). Within hours, the hastag #SomeoneTell CNN was trending globally with the network being forced to issue an apology (Adeiza and Howard, 2016; Cheruiyot, 2016) after the Kenyan Tourism Board cancelled planned advertising.

Beyond the reactive challenges to negative media coverage, the and growth of non-Western news sources such as Aljazeera and China Global Television Network (CGTN) have meant that Africa's global media image is not at singularly determined by Western media (Madrid-Morales and Gorfinkel, 2018; Mellese and Müller, 2012). As Bunce (2015a) observed, a critical mass of digitally connected youth in some African countries is growing and with it, the capacity to counter negative stereotypes about the continent.

2.4.1 Afro-pessimism as a Myth: The Absence of Empirical Data

While there is little argument among scholars about whether Afro-pessimism exists, some have sought to re-examine our conceptualisation of Afro-pessimism. Empirical research by Scott (2009:554), for instance, asserted that "coverage [of Africa in UK newspapers] is not as marginalized, negative or trivial as it is often accused of being". Having analysed 16 Western newspapers, Scott further noted that not only did Africa receive over twice the amount of coverage China did in the two weeks sampled, but almost all newspapers sampled ran at least one front page story on Africa. Furthermore, up to 22 per cent of the articles sampled covered an entire page or more. These findings indicated a minority view of the continent, suggesting that perhaps Africa is not a victim of pessimistic portrayal in the UK media after all.

Scott followed up this relatively small sample with a more comprehensive review of existing literature about Afro-pessimism in Western media coverage. Looking at 163 significant studies published between 1990 and 2014, the study sought to establish the extent of empirical research conducted into US and UK media representations of Africa (Scott, 2015:190). He criticizes existing research for not being "fully objective or comprehensive" (Scott, 2015:193) and for relying on "interviews, speeches, commentaries or other narrative reviews, rather than original empirical analyses of media texts" (2015:194).

What this nuanced approach to the study of Africa's media image in Western media points to is an absence of precision in the use of the term as well as in methodology. As previously discussed, there has been very little distinction among scholars between Afro-pessimism as a general sentiment and as a term defining a very specific phenomenon. As Scott also notes, this gap in knowledge should not be interpreted as a denial of Afro-pessimism in Western media but as the absence of empirical evidence to support such a claim. In other words, because existing research is limited in its geographical scope and methodology, it is "an insufficient basis for drawing firm conclusions about the representation of Africa" (Scott, 2015:206).

A similar conclusion was reached by Tester (2010) in regard to humanitarian logic in the UK. He accused the media and INGOs of engaging in "humanitarianism of media audiences who rely on unquestioned myths to make sense of the suffering of others", a phenomenon he refers to as the "common sense of humanitarianism" (Tester, 2010:34). The perpetuation of these beliefs results in a spurious yet powerful construction of an image of Africa and Africans in the eyes of Western audiences that not only informs their attitudes but also their governments' policies towards the continent. Additional research conducted on the subject also shows that far from deconstructing some of these narratives, the use of modern technologies such as Virtual Reality in humanitarian communication tends to validate and reinforce such myths (Irom, 2018). Similarly, Chouliaraki (2013:45) identifies the existence of a "humanitarian imaginary" in INGO communication, which she defines as " that configuration of practices which use the communicative structure of the theatre in order to perform collective imaginations of vulnerable others in the West, with a view to cultivating a longer-term disposition to thinking, feeling and acting towards these others". The need for empirical data to either back claims of or explain Afro-pessimistic narratives therefore cannot be overstated.

More recently, a study conducted a visual framing analysis of the ways in which 14 European newspapers projected images of Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo – two African countries that are often referred to as failed states. The study aimed to not only investigate the extent of Afro-pessimism projected by these newspapers, but also whether there was a distinction between the ways in which broadsheet and tabloid newspapers engaged with these negative themes (Hellmann, 2020:321). Building on previous research – which showed that broadsheet newspapers generally appeal to readers of higher social and economic status while tabloids appeal to those of low social and economic status (Hammett, 2011; Scott, 2009) – the research reached three conclusions that are relevant to this study.

First, there is a significant difference between the ways in which tabloid and broadsheet newspapers frame African countries deemed to be failed states. The study notes that "tabloids – with striking regularity – visualize these countries as anarchic hellholes, which, because of their inherent physical properties, require help from the outside" (Hellmann, 2020:331). Secondly, the study demonstrates how the 'failed state' frame is not only used for purposes of informing Western policymakers on their engagement to Africa, "it also serves the Western news media to direct their audiences into making sense of conflict and instability in the Global South" (Hellmann, 2020:331). Lastly, the study concludes that because there is significant difference in the extent and nature of Afro-pessimism projected in different types of newspapers about different African countries and to different media markets, Scott (2015) is justified in calling for caution among scholars in making sweeping claims about the extent of Afro-pessimism in the media. It observes that "the Afro-optimism vs Afro-pessimism debate suffers from overgeneralization and that future studies need to be more careful in how they phrase their findings" (Hellmann, 2020:331).

This section has engaged with two main pushbacks on Afro-pessimism as an undesirable reality in Western media. First, I discussed arguments put forward in defences of Afro-pessimism as a narrative. Best captured by Rieff (1998), this position views Africa as being precariously caught in a web of imperialist, postcolonial economic and social world order that it can neither untangle itself from nor equitably exist in without sweeping reform on the part of Western nations' policies. I demonstrated that whereas this view makes forceful arguments in favour of Afro-pessimism, it contributes little to the debate about whether or not Western media are inclined to Afro-pessimistic narratives. The second counterargument, best represented in the work of Scott (2009, 2014, 2015), asserts that negative media coverage of Africa by Western media is a myth, sustained by a combination of unsubstantiated and misleading claims by both scholars and practitioners. The main point being made by this position is not that Afro-pessimism does not exist, but that current research and empirical data does not support the claims of it being widespread, regular and overwhelming in Western media. Hellmann (2020) further demonstrates that the extent and nature of Afro-pessimism in Western media varies greatly among media typologies, the specific African countries being reported on, and the target audiences of the said media. While advising caution about making sweeping claims, these researchers also point to the need for nuance and specificity in the study of Afro-pessimism.

2.5 Afro-Pessimism as a Pejorative for Africans' Extraversion

Extraversion, as noted at the start of this chapter, is the process by which groups or individuals "employ their dependent relationship with the external world to appropriate resources and authority" (Peiffer and Englebert, 2012:361). In the context of Afro-pessimism, this refers to the ways in which Africans appropriate or exploit these negative, simplistic and racialised narratives to achieve their own goals or purposes. The extent to which Africans have been involved in the evolution of Afro-pessimism has long been contested. Many postcolonial theorists have pointed to Western powers and West-controlled global institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and United Nations as the main reason that Africa remains trapped at the bottom of the globalisation pyramid and narratives about the continent continue to be negative (Sakue-Collins, 2020; Cheeseman et al., 2017; Six, 2009; Easterly, 2006; Agunga, 1997).

The counter argument however, has also been made, that Africa(ns) must be seen as active participants in the way they are portrayed and responsible for their place in international relations. Bayart and Ellis (2000) for instance argue that far from being passive victims of Western narratives about them, African countries – particularly the ruling class and elites – have often actively and successfully sought to control Western audiences' perceptions of their countries. They argue that whether in the trans-Atlantic slave trade or the eventual colonisation of Africa, local actors were key participants in and determinants of how these events progressed. This view reinforces an earlier assertion by Bayart (1993:24) that "Africans here have been active agents in the mise en dépendance of their societies".

Both perspectives are important and help to draw a holistic picture of what Afro-pessimism looks like from different angles. I therefore argue for the addition of two aspects to Afro-pessimism, especially as it relates to Africa's media image: the internationalized nature of development work, and extraversion due to local agency.

2.5.1 Internationalized Development

It has been argued that most post-colonial African states have yet to achieve sovereignty in the same sense as Western countries (Herbst, 2020; Schlichte, 2018; Bratton and Chang, 2006). Using Uganda as a case study, Schlichte (2008) argues that this is mainly because they lack the autonomy enjoyed by the West. All Sub-Saharan African states are partially dependent on international donors and aid (Badru, 2012). Because a lot of this aid is conditional and critical to the functioning of the state, most African governments do not have complete autonomy, with donors from both the West and East having considerable sway on various decision-making processes. Similarly, many of these countries continue to experience civil unrest, with internal rebellions and tension constantly challenging the state's monopoly over violence. As a result, "the post-colonial state is suspended in an ever tighter web of international (inter-)dependence, internal power struggles and autonomous local agendas" (Schlichte, 2008:369). For most African states, therefore, political power is internationalized, in the sense that various external forces exercise considerable influence over their resources, decision-making processes, and even foreign policy.

Because of this interlinkage, the analysis of Afro-pessimism cannot be done through simplistic lenses of Western narratives on the one hand and African agency or lack thereof on the other. Studies such as those by Peiffer and Englebert (2012) and Hagmann (2016) show that African governments often reappropriate their dependent relations with Western donor countries in ways that enable them to extract resources and authority from the West for domestic purposes. In Somalia, for instance, Hagmann (2016) analysed the state-building and political settlement processes engaged in by local authorities and the international community for over 25 years. His argues that "local political settlements in Somalia cannot be studied independently of foreign actors and their agendas, because political rule in the country has been strongly internationalized" (Hagmann, 2016:12).

Even in less fragmented African countries, the internationalization of political rule there has meant that media and official narratives about these countries are a result of a complex combination of internal and external interests, perspectives and actions. Fisher (2015) has demonstrated that the governments of Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya actively and aggressively perpetuate specific images that enable them to tap into the foreign policy funding priorities of the West. He notes that "the level and extent of Western support to these governments… has generally been contingent on the latter fitting a particular profile vis-à-vis Western interests" Fisher (2015:63). Therefore, African governments have actively engaged with INGOs and Western media to perpetuate, challenge or reappropriate Western narratives about their countries.

A clear instance of this in Uganda is its government's narrative on HIV/AIDS. In the early 1990s when Uganda was faced with high infection and death rates, the government – keen on donor funding – was willing to project an image of helplessness and urgent need. Working with INGOs, the government willingly shared with the world images and narratives of the horrific effect the pandemic had had on the country (Parkhurst and Lush, 2004; Putzel, 2004). This translated into a massive increase in foreign aid to the country, making local civil society organisations such as The Aids Support Organisation (TASO) some of the largest and most funded HIV/AIDS interventions in the world (Nakkazi, 2020). Other researchers have also shown that the Ugandan government used the HIV pandemic and resources coming from it to secure an international image of global leadership in the fight against AIDS (Doyle, 2020) and even build local bureaucratic capacity, territorial reach and legitimacy (Bukenya, 2013). In other words, negative narratives about Uganda were both perpetuated by its leaders and repurposed to serve their local political, economic and foreign policy priorities.

However, as the country's dependence on international aid has reduced, so has the government's willingness to perpetuate narratives of need and hopelessness. Fisher (2015:80) notes that "as donor funding of the country's budget has reduced from over 50 per cent in the mid-2000s to 19 per cent in 2013, so has the Museveni regime moved away from the 'pro-poor' economic and development spending priorities which won it such praise from donors in the 1990s and 2000s".

Fisher’s study is particularly enlightening because it also demonstrates the dangers African governments face when they do not engage in strategic image management. The Kenyan government, for instance, was not – within the same period of time – as aggressive and intentional with their image in the eyes of Western donors. Little was done to counter perceptions of corruption, economic incompetence and unpredictability under the Moi and Kibaki regimes. This, Fisher argues, was down to the country’s unique polity and sociology. While Museveni’s regime was a result of a “highly-disciplined, personalised and centralised guerrilla movement”, Kenya’s Moi and Kibaki governments were “formed through the uniting of disparate and often hostile coalitions” whose support was drawn from competing ethnic and regional communities (Fisher, 2015:79; Carrier and Kochore, 2014).

Furthermore, while the Ugandan government has been deeply dependant on foreign aid for its general budget, Kenya has never received any such support and has not been dependent on aid since the mid-1990s. This relative economic independence, coupled with tenuous coalition politics, has meant that Kenyan governments have invested a lot more in local narratives than international image management. Fisher (2015) observes that neither the Moi government nor Kibaki’s intentionally cultivated relationships with Western media organisations and did very little to counter accusations of corruption and incompetence from both national and international media. In the 2007 and 2013 general elections, winning voter support in Kenya was largely dependent on attacking the West (Fisher, 2015; Cheeseman et al., 2014). Ironically, because of this lack of intentional image management, Kenyan governments found their authority domestically was “undermined by aid cuts and negative advisories” occasioned by the West (Fisher, 2015:80).

These studies show that Afro-pessimism is neither the preserve of the West nor are its effects to be understood in binary terms of good or bad. Instead, it is important that a more nuanced approach is taken to studying it, with emphasis on the intentions and identities of the various players involved in its perpetuation. I argue, as have others, like Fisher (2015,2014a,2014b,2013,2012), Douglas (2019) and Fanta (2015), that African leaders and institutions have also invested in advancing the negative images Western media are accused of pervading, thereby advancing at least two aspects of Afro-pessimism as earlier defined. First, that Africa is in trouble but can be saved (de B'béri and Louw, 2011) and second, that of prediction: that they are best placed to make determinations about Africa's fate (Nothias, 2012).

The argument here, therefore, is not that previous definitions of Afro-pessimism and its attributes were incorrect. Neither is it a denial of the presence of these negative narratives in Western media and their logic. Instead, what the scholarship discussed above reveals is that the definitions advanced by de B'béri and Louw (2011) and Nothias (2012) are incomplete in so far as they attribute the production of the said narratives only (or mainly) to the West and their effects to the negative image Africa receives as a result. An analysis of African leaders and civil society institutions shows that they too engage in Afro-pessimistic narratives. However, a closer look at their intentions reveals a much more complex interdependent relationship between Afro-pessimistic narratives and African countries' development goals, with the former deployed to achieve the latter. As pointed out at the start of this chapter, this phenomenon has been dubbed extraversion.

Because of this duality in meaning – its unique position as both a (post)colonial worldview on the one hand and a repurposed tool of appropriation by African countries on the other – Afro-pessimism is best understood as a set of assumptions that underpin Africa's dominant socio-economic and political relationship with the rest of the world. These assumptions include the five attributes advanced by Nothias (2012) and the four theses outlined by de B'béri and Louw (2011). However, the manner in which these assumptions are used and the effect they have on the continent's 54 nations varies greatly, depending on the players involved (Western individuals/organisations or African leaders/institutions) and the purpose for which they are employed. When applied, Afro-pessimism produces negative, stereotypical narratives about Africa and Africans. However, as seen from the examples of the Ugandan government, Afro-pessimistic narratives can be used as an effective tool for resource mobilisation and the acquisition of soft power.

To assert that Afro-pessimism is not the preserve of the West is not to absolve Western media, INGOs and other international players from negative and stereotypical narratives about the continent. Evidence of racist, racialised, imperialist and patronising narratives of the continent by the West abounds (Fish et al., 2020; French, 2016; Paterson, 2016b; Stavinoha, 2016; Harth, 2012; Khor, 2010; O'rourke, 2009; Ojo, 2002; Brookes, 1995; El Zein and Cooper, 1992; Hawk, 1992b; Curtin, 1965). However, scholarship is increasingly revealing that African players – recognising opportunities to achieve local personal and institutional goals in this uneven relationship – are not passive victims but active participants in some of these characterisations.

2.5.2 Afro-pessimism as a Strategy

Afro-pessimism, therefore, can be understood as a communications strategy characterised by negative, stereotypical and generalised narratives about Africa and her people. Furthermore, as with all strategies, Afro-pessimism can be motivated or triggered by an array of intentions/interests, ranging from infrahumanisation and racism among groups external to the continent to political, socio-economic and personal goals among African actors. Also, because of the peculiarity of the players, intentions and contexts involved in its production, its effects are not clear-cut, fixed or a foregone conclusion. As seen in the cases of Uganda and Kenya discussed above, image management is a key determinant of access to foreign aid to African governments. INGOs also depend heavily on their ability to convince donors of both need in the communities they operate in and their (organisational) capacity to bring about positive change. Because the motivation and intentions behind Afro-pessimistic narratives differ – as do the responses to it by the various players involved – it is important that researchers heeds the call to "be careful not to commit the same errors – of essentialisation, subjective interpretation and naturalising assumptions – that it often accuses the media of making" (Scott, 2016:50).

Conceptualising Afro-pessimism as a strategy expands on previous definitions that focus on its narrative content and characteristics and enables scholars to go beyond the binary arguments for and against it. Instead, we are able to examine, contextualise and understand Afro-pessimism as a strategic narrative employed by various groups – including Africans – for political and economic ends. It also appropriately positions African players on an equal footing with external groups in the adoption of Afro-pessimistic narratives for specific intentions, thereby allowing for examining their (Africans') agency in more comprehensive and nuanced ways. As has been observed, "analysing African media fields as engaging in 'meaningful acts' rather than as peripheral is important in developing a richer understanding of the politics of discourse and representation in global politics' (Wahutu, 2018a:61).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter achieves five key objectives. First, it introduces and explains dominant definitions and understandings of Afro-pessimism, providing the historical context of its use, the themes it is usually applied to, as well as the sectors/regions most accused of it. Broadly, Afro-pessimism refers to negative, simplistic, racialised and patronising narratives about Africa that reinforce the idea that the continent and her people are homogenous, without agency and – but for Western (white) intervention – are unable to solve the problems or issues they face. I also argue that for the most part, Western media as well as INGOs have been blamed most often for perpetuating Afro-pessimism.

Secondly, I argue that although the term has largely been theorised as a Western (media and INGO) perspective of Africa, there is growing evidence and research showing that negative media narratives about the continent are not the preserve of the West. Instead, researchers are increasingly demonstrating that Africans at both individual and institutional levels actively engage in the production and perpetuation of Afro-pessimistic narratives. This is in part due to the financial and political limitations African media face in reporting news from other parts of the continent and the dominance of Western news agencies' reporting on the continent because of their historical (colonial) presence and their economies of scale.

Relatedly, I show that INGOs have become influential players in defining, introducing and explaining Africa to Western audiences. Through a combination of the decline in Western media's investment in bureaus in Africa, increased professionalisation and capacity building of their communications departments and the economic benefits of adopting media-savvy public engagement techniques, INGOs have severally been accused of reinforcing Afro-pessimistic narratives.

However, I also explain these critiques of both the media and INGOs are not without reply. The chapter also introduces the concept of post-colonial reflexivity, noting that many journalists and INGOs are not only conscious and accepting of the notion that their (sector's) work has historically perpetuated Afro-pessimism but are also actively taking steps to mitigate this. Unfortunately, I explain that post-colonial reflexivity does not necessarily address Afro-pessimism and instead has the potential to perpetuate it while indemnifying those responsible for it.

Having noted that Afro-pessimism is not the preserve of the West, I then interrogate how and why Africans, particularly politicians and those involved in the civil society sector perpetuate (or at best refrain from challenging) Afro-pessimism. At individual level, local politicians and fixers engage with international (Western) media, providing them (access to) narratives of poverty, need, and positive impacts of aid. This in turn influences not only what is reported about the continent but also how it is reported. I also point to how African governments, such as Uganda's, intentionally invest in projecting their countries as both in urgent need of help from the West and making significant development progress as a result of it. When the economic and political benefits of such narratives enable the retention of power by local politicians, Afro-pessimism is employed as a strategy of extraversion, as seen in Uganda and Somalia. However, in other cases such as Kenya, where there was less reliance on foreign aid, the political context necessitated that far more attention be focused on local perceptions and narratives than international image management. This allowed Afro-pessimistic narratives about the country to go unchallenged or strategically managed, resulting in loss of Western donor confidence and foreign aid.

The point of these discussions is to problematise Afro-pessimism, to demonstrate the duality of its narratives. On the one hand, international media and INGOs carry stories with simplistic, racialised narratives about the continent to their audiences. On the other hand, African media, governments and civil society actors use these narratives as a way of gaining agency and resources in a highly unequal political and economic world structure that puts them at the bottom of the internationalisation pyramid. I therefore conclude by proposing that definitions of Afro-pessimism need to be expanded to include conceptualising it as a strategy employed by African players and civil society (INGOs) for economic and political gain and not just a phenomenon that happens to the continent and her peoples. Having provided the general context of debates around Afro-pessimism and provided a theoretical line of inquiry that this research is interested in, the next chapter turns to the focus of the thesis: INGOs.

3 International Non-Governmental Organisations and the Development Agenda: A Critical View

3.1 Introduction

The definition of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) has long been contested. There are several reasons for this, not least among them is that the term encompasses a wide range of civil society actors. For instance, it can be used in reference to Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), Private Voluntary Organisations (PVOs) and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). To complicate matters, although NGOs are conceived to be separate from governments, states have long been known to form or support NGOs as a way of influencing, mitigating or engaging civil society action (Kleinschmit and Edwards, 2017). Such entities are known as Government-Organised Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs). It is therefore unsurprising that most attempts at defining NGOs are not all-encompassing and often fail to fully capture the scope of work done by these institutions.

A section of this chapter is dedicated to discussing some of the working definitions of NGOs. In this this thesis, however, I use the term interchangeably with INGOs and, unless otherwise stated, do so in reference to voluntary, non-secret associations whose mandate is derived outside the formal state apparatus, do not have profit, proselytising or political activities as their primary objective, and operate in multiple countries in both the Global North and South.

This chapter builds on the previous discussion of Africa's media image, providing a theoretical contextualisation for the development sector and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). The overall objective of the chapter is to demonstrate the existence of several historical and contemporary sites of contestation in INGOs' communication, operations and structures. I do this in three ways. First, I discuss the contested origins of the development sector and INGOs from a post-colonial perspective. I particularly engage with scholarship that questions the intentions of the Bretton Woods institutions and the development agenda thereafter. I then explore the equally contested definitions of INGOs and the implications they have on the way INGO communication is received and understood by various audiences. I note that INGOs have largely been defined along three major themes: as agents of change, as counterpowers, and as representatives of the underprivileged. However, I argue that these definitions are more aspirational in nature than descriptive of INGOs' substantive practices. As a result, there is a disconnect between what we think of when we talk of INGOs and what they actually are. This disparity, I argue, is a result of an over-reliance on INGO-generated or funded information about themselves. The third section of the chapter discusses the shifting boundaries between development and humanitarianism.

Specifically, I discuss some of the inter- and intra-organisational tensions arising between marketing and communications teams on the one hand and five INGOs on the other. I also discuss some of the recent industry-wide cultural shifts aimed in part at challenging INGOs' reproduction of Afro-pessimism. I conclude by discussing some of the opportunities for and risks around increased local agency brought about by these tensions and shifts, including the development sector's response to accusations of Afro-pessimism.

3.2 A Postcolonial Approach to Development

The history of INGOs is inevitably intertwined with that of development as a sector. An ongoing debate within the field concerns the original intentions of the wider development agenda. Many development studies theorists tend to situate the historical beginning of this sector in 1945 with the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions (Kothari, 2019; Servaes and Malikhao, 2008; Opoku-Mensah et al., 2007; Chandra, 2003). Because this period falls well within the period of colonialism, some have argued that, from the very beginning, international development was built as a top-down initiative meant mainly to satisfy the goals and strategic interests of the West at the expense of the rest (Escobar, 2011; Holmén, 2010).

However, others such as Helleiner (2009:190) have argued that most scholarship on the sector has downplayed the significant amount of 'development content'[2] involved in the initial stages of the World Bank's formation. From his perspective, the view that international development has largely been a "top-down neo-imperialist project imposed on poorer countries by the US and other rich countries driven by various strategic and economic interests" does not match reality (Helleiner, 2009:208). Instead, he insists that the US and other Western countries initiated aid programmes to Latin America and the Global South primarily from a humanitarian perspective.

This contrast in historical positioning is important to note, as it results in two parallel perspectives in the development sector. If one takes the view that INGOs have their origins in the 'development content' Helleiner points to, then they can be viewed largely as humanitarian organisations – established by well-meaning members of the Global North with largely philanthropic objectives and quite distinct from the colonial project – addressing the plight of many in the Global South. On the other hand, if INGOs are understood to have originated from colonial machinations, then they inevitably would be seen as agents of neo-colonialism and the global imbalances in which the South is dominated by the North. The reality, as is often the case, seems to be a mixed bag of both perspectives.

[2] Helleiner uses 'development content' to refer to a mutually earnest interest and focus on the root causes of poverty by both the West (led by the United States and the UK) and the poorer countries that were involved in the discussions that established the World Bank. He is convinced that not only was the West less concerned with its interests in the Global South than has been suggested, but that there was far more focus on helping poor countries grow their economies than is acknowledged by most commentators.

While Helleiner is justified in pointing to the Bretton Woods conference as a pivotal point in history from which INGOs derived much of their development mandate, it is important not to lose sight of how the conference was arranged by the United States, whose imperial intentions were not just a subject of academic debate but were a political reality for countries in the Americas and Asia (Dezalay and Garth, 2002; Bodenheimer, 1971). Moreover, since the conference and development of the sector, international development of most African countries entailed a neo-colonial process in which former colonial powers offered political independence on the one hand, while on the other, they made demands and offered 'expert' opinions on how and what kind of development was acceptable. On several occasions, the financial aid offered to the new African states was not merely philanthropic, but also assisted in the expansion of the inequalities and exploitation that empire and capitalism introduced in the Global South (Mamdani, 2018; Kothari, 2005; Césaire, 2000; Quayson, 2000).

Furthermore, during the colonial era, development was widely understood to be an investment in the welfare of colonies to improve their capacity to meet the industrial needs of the empire (Otte, 2011; Fraser, 1996). Pomeranz (2005:41), for instance, concluded that in reality development was simply "developmental imperialism", while Curtis (2003:317) asserted that Western colonial policy was committed to preventing the 'independent development' of former colonies.

Escobar (1988:429) also asserted that the historical roots of development as a concept are to be found in the attempts by the West and East to redefine themselves in ways that ensured they retained power in a post-colonial world. From his perspective, development is a historically produced discourse that not only subjugated colonised places like Africa to the Global North's concepts of what it means to be developed, but also conferred upon the former colonial countries the power to determine what former colonies needed to do in order to become 'developed' (Escobar, 2011). Mudimbe (1988) and Dossa (2007) agree with this perspective, positing that colonialism conditioned Africa to accept their othering and uncritically accept the notion that development necessarily means attaining the social, economic, spiritual and political status of the Global North.

3.2.1 Development or Humanitarianism: Tensions in Conceptualising International Development

Pointing out this interrelation between international development and colonialism, Kothari (2016, 2005) warns against compartmentalising development into a largely humanitarian undertaking on the one hand and rejecting it as a colonial scheme on the other. This, she argues, not only "assumes that colonialism was not concerned with [humanitarianism] but more problematically… that development necessarily is" (Kothari, 2005:50). This warning is especially merited when considering Africa's colonial history. In East Africa, British explorer David Livingstone was an advocate of colonial expansion, an opponent of the slave trade, and a Christian missionary (Clayton, 2003). His humanitarian work did not preclude contributing to British imperial interests and his quest to 'discover' the source of the Nile lent to the othering of indigenous people's knowledge about the same as well as a denial of their agency.[3]

Even in academia, knowledge about Africa – and the production process that creates it – is highly contested. Recent research has pointed out that respected journals such as the *Journal of African Affairs*, founded in 1901, was 'an imperial instrument' whose contents "reflected the colonial period, the need to understand Africa's peoples in order to rule them more effectively and a colonial mentality of "modernizing" Africa" (Cheeseman et al., 2017:2).

[3] Right up to the early 1990s, primary school pupils in Uganda were taught that Livingstone was the first man to see the source of the Nile. This narrative has recently been revised to clarify that he was the first Briton/white man to do so.

Many INGOs that started operations in Africa after the independence years (in the late 1950s to the 1960s) did so with the aim of providing humanitarian assistance. However, many former colonial officers remained in the countries they had operated in to provide leadership and expertise to these INGOs and their agendas (Kothari, 2005). Furthermore, many of these INGOs were encouraged to establish operations by former colonial employees and were supported by their home governments. In such cases, the line between colonialism and development work was at best blurred.

In seeking to understand INGOs and their work, it is important to go beyond their stated intentions and to interrogate the political economy of their establishment and operations. While there has been significant effort to do this within anthropology, development studies and political science, there has been limited post-colonial inquiry of INGO story production processes. This research seeks to contribute towards filling that gap.

3.3 The Aspirational Nature of INGO Definitions

In spite of the significant amount of research that has been conducted over the years regarding development and development agencies, an exact definition of NGOs and INGOs remains elusive. While several prominent scholars have written expansively about the genesis and conceptualisation of development (see Escobar, 2011; Holmén, 2010; Payne and Phillips, 2010; Escobar, 1988), few have devoted significant time to defining the organisations at the heart of it.

This is mostly because development has often been described or defined in aspirational rather than real terms. And since aspirations are highly relative and dependent on context, development has come to mean different things to different people. What is often described therefore, is not what is, but what could – or should – be (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010; Thomas, 2004). Similarly, “more is believed than known about NGOs” (Holmén, 2010:4). Because aspirations and beliefs tend to be idealistic, the INGOs end up being described along the lines of their envisioned potential rather than what they actually are. With this in mind, INGOs have been conceptualised along three general lines: as agents of change (Risse-Kappen et al., 1999), as representatives of the underprivileged (Dogra, 2012), and as information counterpowers[4] (Castells, 2007). The next section looks at three definitions of NGOs and the challenges that each faces in capturing the realities of INGO operations and structures.

3.4 INGOs and the Lack of Conceptual Clarity

The first definition interrogated conceives INGOs as “social organisations motivated to work in sectors like religion, sociocultural, economic, educational, environment, women, children, etc. irrespective of any political ideology and belief… for the benefit of socially and economically backward people” (Ghimire, 2008:204). As discussed earlier, development is – at least in part – a historically constructed discourse that normalises the Global North and others the Global South. INGOs have historically played a key role in this process by (intentionally or otherwise) becoming the vehicles through which this discourse is disseminated, engaged with and implemented. They are often seen as instigators or catalysts of positive societal change, by which I mean the progression of African communities along the development continuum from conditions regarded as backward, poor or undesirable towards greater similarity to societies in the Global North.

[4] Castells argues that INGOs conceive of themselves as “enforcers of unenforced human rights” (Castells, 2007:84). In so doing, they place themselves on a collision course with governments and other established powers (like corporate companies) which tend to be the primary stakeholders in the upholding of these rights. Both he and Waisbord argue that the contestation for the enforcement of these rights takes place mainly through the media, with each party trying to gain favourable public opinion about their efforts. It is in this sense that INGOs are conceived as information counterpowers.

In pronouncing INGO target audiences socially and economically backward, this definition reproduces colonial dichotomies that characterise the Global North as the developed, sophisticated and benevolent benefactor of the helpless Global South. The definition also ignores several realities, not least that all NGOs by their very nature espouse certain political beliefs and will work towards achieving them (DeMars, 2005). To the extent that their beliefs are threatened (by both internal and external factors), NGOs will tend to engage in (political) advocacy (Mosse and Lewis, 2005). In 2014, for instance, World Vision made a decision to hire gay Christians in same-sex marriages. This was a significant departure from their long-held position against hiring openly gay people and sparked controversy worldwide, with over 5,000 donors choosing to discontinue their support (Gracey and Weber, 2014b). Two days later, the decision was reversed, with the organisation's board acknowledging that their action had been taken without adequately consulting their supporters (Gracey and Weber, 2014a).

Other INGOs have also faced accusations of crossing the line between charity and politics. As far back as 1991, Oxfam and Christian Aid were accused of political abuse and bias, with the former even being censured by the Charity Commissioners for England and Wales (Burnell, 1992:311). Similarly, Action Aid's activities in Uganda were temporarily thrown into jeopardy when the government froze their bank accounts and closed their offices, accusing them of funding opposition and terrorist groups (Bukenya and Nakaiza, 2018). The point here is not to prove or assert that these claims and accusations against INGOs are (un)true, but to show that while INGOs may claim to pursue their goals in an apolitical manner, the activities they undertake in achieving them are severally viewed or understood to be political by other actors.

It has been argued that aid, which is the principal NGO currency, is "a relation of government: a set of technologies having the power to reorganize the relationship between people and things to achieve desired aims" (Duffield, 2002). It can therefore be argued that far from being apolitical, NGOs tend to work towards achieving goals that are set in certain political ideologies and beliefs. A classic case in point is the Chilean authoritarian General Augusto Pinochet, who ended up stranded in London from November 1998 to January 2000 because of a campaign by human rights NGOs led by Amnesty International to pressure the UK government to extradite him to Spain, where he was facing charges of crimes against humanity (DeMars, 2005).

The advocacy both for and against change is a political process conducted primarily through the media. In the World Vision case, the organisation invested heavily in communicating both the initial change and its reversal across a wide spectrum of media in an effort to reach as many people as possible within their constituency. This dependency on the media is precisely why there is a need to investigate and understand the processes through which the development and humanitarian work gets communicated. At the same time, it calls into question the extent to which INGOs can be understood as being information counterpowers, given their ability to effect change is directly linked to the attention the media gives them.

Another definition, offered by the World Bank, is that NGOs are "groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and characterized primarily by humanitarian or cooperative, rather than commercial, objectives" (Dicklitch, 1998). Like the previous definition, the World Bank relied heavily on the normative objectives of NGOs to define them. While all NGOs in the UK are registered as charity organisations and the majority are legally independent of the governments of the African countries in which they are registered or operate, the reality is that they are heavily dependent on nation-state governments for permission to situate themselves in their communities of operation, for funding or – as is often the case – a combination of the two (Roth, 2015; Holmén, 2010; Cooley and Ron, 2002). This also compromises their claims of autonomy from the state and position as counterpowers.

There has certainly been an increase in the interactivity and interdependence between NGOs and governments over the past three decades (Keck, 2015; DeMars, 2005). DeMars notes that "no NGO can continue to exist for long without the generosity of donors, the cooperation of home and host governments, an identifiable beneficiary population and a societal pool from which to draw committed staff members" (DeMars 2005:7). This interdependence has grown and become so complex over the last half century (Escobar, 2011) that some scholars have come to the conclusion that INGOs' political influence is a lot more significant than is claimed by both critics and apologists for NGOs (Holmén, 2010; Norton-Griffiths, 2010; Abélès, 2008). This complex relationship ultimately brings into contestation the very definition of these organisations as non-governmental.

It has further been shown that in the years leading up to the 9/11 attacks on the US and ever since, the United States has adopted an approach towards development aid that is "self-consciously American internationalist" (Mosse, 2005:9), in which development projects funded by the Millennium Challenge Account were conditioned upon the achieving of three principles in line with America's vision for the world: ruling justly, investing in people, and economic freedom.

Moreover, there has also been a considerable shift from loans or unconditional partnerships with INGOs to 'performance-based grants' (Mosse, 2005). Nation states have also remodelled their funding such that security outcomes for donor states are pegged on funding given to INGOs (Duffield, 2002), further blurring the lines between what is purely an apolitical, humanitarian agenda by an INGO and what is a thinly veiled push of foreign policy objectives by Western states. For some scholars, this distinction is inconsequential and development itself was never an apolitical, altruistic attempt at bettering the quality of life in the Global South but yet another form of exploitation (Hickel, 2017; Escobar, 2011; Freire, 1970). Nevertheless, even if a more charitable view was adopted of development, the reality of its practice and execution is such that the political interests of governments are a potent part of the development equation.

The final definitions discussed in this chapter are more cognisant of the tension between normative intentions of NGOs and reality. First is Iriye (1999:442), who defines them as "voluntary and open (non-secret) associations of individuals outside of the formal state apparatus (central and local governments, police and armed forces, legislative and judicial bodies, etc.) that are neither for profit nor engage in political activities as their primary objective". Steffek (2013:993) defines them as "non-state, non-profit-oriented organisations with voluntary membership".

These definitions effectively avoid boxing NGOs into their stated, often clear cut and normative objectives which, as discussed in the previous section, are never strictly adhered to. They also succeed in defining NGOs' status in relation to nation-state governments without insinuating an unambiguous relationship with the state or commercial, for-profit institutions.

The effect of defining NGOs largely along the lines of what they are not, as (Steffek, 2013) does, is that it reveals very little about what NGOs actually are. However, this is the definition's largest strength, for it (perhaps inadvertently) brings us to the heart of the nature of NGOs: that their nature is as ambiguous and varied as are their intentions and aspirations.

As the discussion of these definitions shows, there is no conceptual clarity about what definitions best describe NGOs. While each highlights important aspects of their work, none quite captures the full extent of their composition, operational reality or impact. In some cases, the definitions proposed are actually in direct contradiction of what many NGOs do or how they do it. This challenge is further complicated because a significant amount of information that is available about the nature of their work and composition is generated by NGOs themselves and their funders (Stroup and Wong, 2016; Steffek, 2013; DeMars, 2005) or adopted uncritically by scholars. DeMars puts it this way:

> No one can study all NGOs at once. But scholars prejudge the politics of NGOs most profoundly, and most invisibly, when they demarcate empirical research according to conventional distinctions adopted uncritically from the world of NGOs and their funders… What is needed is a new theory that is conceptually independent of the social actors that it analyses, that cuts across issue-areas and other conventional distinctions that distract attention from the political impact of NGOs, and that directs empirical attention to the variable and particular consequences of NGO action. (DeMars, 2005:39-40)

The point here is not that the definitions offered are wrong, but that they are incomplete. They are incomplete because there has always been a chasm between NGOs' stated aims and objectives on the one hand, and the reality of their operation and structure on the other.

While this is generally true about NGOs globally, it is especially so in Africa. The continent not only has one of the highest amounts of NGO activity in the world, but has also been more impacted by their activities than anywhere else (Manji and O'Coill, 2002; Dicklitch, 1998). The next section provides a historical context for INGO operations in Africa and how these origins impact the ways in which they communicate their work to audiences in the Global North. Although the issues raised affect the entire Sub-Saharan Africa region, particular emphasis is put on East Africa, as the location/scope of this research.

3.5 International INGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa

In this section, I provide a brief historical overview necessary for understanding the role of INGOs in Africa. I particularly point out some of the major parallels between colonial powers' attitudes towards the African continent and INGOs' operations there. In doing so, I argue that INGOs – intentionally or otherwise – have played a major role in perpetuating some of Africa's most negative stereotypes that find their roots in colonial times. This position links to the next chapter, which analyses these stereotypes in greater detail and the reasons behind Africa's media image.

International Non-Governmental Organisations are ever-increasing in significance and influence around the world (Wright, 2015; Turner, 2010). Their explosion in numbers during the 1980s, and their continued increase, has traditionally been credited to decolonization of the 'Third World' as well as an increase in global interaction and concerns (Franks, 2013; Iriye, 1999). Indeed, the push for independence in most African countries that took place in the 1960s coincided with the dramatic increase in INGOs working in Africa. That was particularly the case with all the INGOs that this research focused on. One prominent explanation for this is that with colonial powers ceding authority to new African states, Western influence in Africa transitioned to the indirect but nonetheless potent soft power of INGOs (Young and Kent, 2013). Over the years, they have become akin to experts on issues relating to Africa, and their influence has expanded from simply providing humanitarian relief aid to more long-term investments in sectors such as education, maternal and child health, and food security (Yanacopulos, 2015b; Pillay, 2010).

Their existence, however, has not always enjoyed support from either practitioners or scholars. Indeed, scholars have criticized INGOs for undermining local capacity (de Beer, 2010) and in some cases exacerbating crises on the continent, often in pursuit of foreign interests (Mamdani, 2009). Others have even gone so far as to assert that INGOs took over from where colonial powers left off, thereby contributing to "a continuing saga of domination, exploitation and humiliation of the continent by European and American imperial powers" (Shivji, 2007:3). From this perspective, INGOs are seen as having colluded with the largely failed Western neo-liberal financial and socio-political changes imposed on the young African states through the now infamous Structural Adjustment Programs (Wiegratz, 2016; Moyo, 2009).

While Shivji is quick to point out that many INGOs and their leaders may have had the best of intentions, he insists that that they were nonetheless pawns in a much larger scheme. He therefore stresses that while there is no doubt about their good intentions and motivations, "we do not judge the outcome of a process by the intentions of its authors. We aim to analyse the objective effects of actions, regardless of their intentions" (Shivji, 2007:5). NGOs, he argues, have undermined the ability of most African states to develop home-grown solutions and be in charge of their destiny.

This view was shared by journalist and academic Andrew Mwenda. He argued that INGOs, and the aid they bring, provide African states with indirect subsidies for corruption and incompetence, disincentivising the tax reform necessary for increased local revenue (Mwenda, 2007; 2006:3). Furthermore, he argued that in countries such as Uganda, which at the time (2006-7) had over half of their annual budgets supported by donors and INGOs, governments became more accountable to donors than citizens. This eventually undermined democracy.

> The problem in many African countries is that governments look for revenue not in the domestic economy but in the pockets of international donors. Rather than listen to investors and other constituencies regarding their policy and institutional needs, many governments find it easier to negotiate with international creditors for foreign aid. In that manner, foreign aid impedes the emergence of a mutually beneficial relationship between the government and the citizens. It also encourages a dependence mentality among politicians and bureaucrats, so that every time there is a fiscal shortage, they are inclined to look for aid, rather than for policies and institutions that favour economic growth. Aid thus undermines long-term growth. (Mwenda, 2006:4)

This scepticism about INGOs' efficacy in the development of Africa has not been limited to politics and social development. Dogra (2012) for instance criticizes INGOs for grossly distorting and misrepresenting global poverty, especially as it relates to places like Africa. She points out that, among others, the de-contextualization and de-historicization of funding appeals by INGOs have contributed to a skewed understanding of poverty and the 'developing' world among Western audiences (Dogra, 2012:140). When appealing for funds to help in war-ravaged parts of Africa, for instance, she notes that most UK-based INGOs either avoid or ignore the historical and colonial causes, choosing instead to focus on the immediate needs of the ‘helpless’, ‘innocent’ children and mothers (Dogra, 2012:142).

The rationale behind this exclusion of history and context has largely been economic. For many of the INGO informants Dogra interviewed, including the past in their communication distracted Western audiences, evoking guilt and finger-pointing as opposed to ‘positive’ messages that focus on the solution which – almost invariably – was defined in terms of financial commitments or contributions to the INGO (Dogra, 2012:143). She further observes:

> This shows that INGOs cater first and foremost to their understanding of the Northern public and their responsibilities and any historical reality or Majority World views in this regard is secondary. This also raises the question: for whom do the messages have to be positive – people in the Developed World or Majority West? (Dogra, 2012:144)

Even in other parts of the world, INGOs have been accused of selectively portraying people to fit into stereotypes consistent with Afro-pessimism. In Brazil for instance, Cornwall (2005:19) criticised Action-Aid’s failure to use fair-skinned children for UK fundraising for fear they might not “fit the image of what the deserving poor or the innocent child ought to look like”.

Another common misrepresentation of the ‘developing’ world by INGOs is through what Dogra calls ‘infantilisation’ and ‘feminisation’, that is, the repeated and almost exclusive use of children and women in the representation of the ‘developing’ world with the end result being that audiences begin to think of these places merely in terms of children and women (see Dogra, 2012:31-63). Ninety per cent of the messages produced by UK-based INGOs about poverty in the ‘developing’ world contained images of women and children. Only nine per cent portrayed men (Dogra, 2014).

Douglas (2019) also argues that Western media and INGO discourses about Africa are generally contained within a reductive, racialised frame. This, she argues, needs to be understood from the perspective that “development is a project that was born from historical processes that shaped Europe's ideological Othering of Africa to justify colonialism" (Douglas, 2019:46). The 'positive', decontextualised and 'dehistoricised' messages Dogra (2012) identifies are seen by Douglas (2019) as creating a highly essentialised lens through which the West sees, understands and engages with Africa. It is therefore no wonder that INGOs have been heavily criticised for their structural imbalances and negative portrayal of Africa. Some scholars from as early as the start turn of the century even went so far as to declare that "development, it seems, has failed" (Manji and O'Coill, 2002), while Easterly (2006) unambiguously criticises most INGOs' efforts as focusing more on their host's terms and conditions than the needs and aspirations of the vulnerable communities they (INGOs) claim to serve. He also asserts that aid efforts to some countries, such as Angola, ought to be abandoned altogether, as they are – in his estimation – failed states that are beyond redemption. More recently, Walton et al. (2016) have suggested that a more nuanced approach to development that combines both local context and participatory approaches is needed if INGOs are to retain any legitimacy.

This is not a new proposition. Beckett (2011,2010,2009), for instance, has advocated for the adoption of 'networked journalism' which he defines as "a synthesis of traditional news journalism and the emerging forms of participatory media enabled by Web 2.0 technologies such as mobile phones, email, websites, blogs, micro-blogging, and social networks" (Beckett, 2010:1). His argument for networked journalism goes as follows: on one hand, INGOs can provide the resources and access journalists lack to tell more contextualised and nuanced stories about development. On the other hand, journalists and the media have the power to tell stories that are not only widely read, but also able to influence policy and public opinion in the West. Therefore, a more intentional collaboration between journalists and INGOs could potentially increase the participation of disenfranchised communities and people (in this case Africans) in the production processes of news about them. He acknowledges that such networked journalism jeopardises news organisations' claim to editorial independence while also limiting INGOs' role as advocates and campaigners. However, he argues that the benefits accruing from it – greater participation of the public in news production and (therefore) greater trust in and legitimacy of news – outweigh these risks (Beckett, 2010, 2009).

Douglas (2019), however, warns against such optimism:

> no matter how much context INGOs provide journalists with to add texture to often rapidly constructed stories, that context is presented through a particular prism – development/aid – which has a particular history: the colonially rooted idea that SSA [Sub-Saharan Africa] is backward and in need of Western help. Thus, there may be depth within mainstream news storytelling facilitated by INGOs, but that depth arguably has little breadth and at the bottom lies a deeply problematic history. (Douglas, 2019:34)

The next section discusses some of the various historical centres of power within INGOs and the development sector structures that have contributed to the perpetuation of Africa's media image.

3.6 Political Economy of INGOs Organisational Structures

That INGOs have significant political impact and influence is largely acknowledged by both scholars and practitioners. Until the early to mid-1990s, however, there had been very little research focused on the power dynamics that result from INGOs' composition, organisational structures and delivery of their programmes. For her part, Finnemore (1996) asserts that INGOs shape nation states' understandings of social values, international relations norms and even the structure and role of the state. Even those opposed to neoliberalism and the development paradigm that has come with it are quick to concede that INGOs are powerful and extremely influential players in international politics, with the underlying assumption being the greater the number of INGOs, the more firmly their normative values are established. Like for-profit companies, INGOs' organisational structures ultimately affect the manner in which they operate and the power bases within their organisations (Anheier and Themudo, 2008). These power bases are multi-faceted, ranging from geo-political and economic to gender-based (Dicklitch, 1998).

This section interrogates the various ways in which INGOs' organisational structures affect the perceptions and interactions between the Global North and South. It does this in two ways; first, I discuss their composition – their historical set up, geographical locations and employee demographics and their effect on the balance of power between the Global North and South. I argue that given the colonial history of interaction between the two, INGOs – most of which were founded in the Global North – tend to retain colonial tendencies such as top-down organisational structures in which those based in Western offices are regarded as senior to those based in the South. This in turn has an impact on decision-making processes, with staff members based in the North – the fundraising site for INGOs – making the strategic decisions affecting those based in the South – the organisations' operational site. The result is a dissonance between many of these INGOs' stated aims of empowering communities in the Global South and their organisational practice, which puts those at the frontline of development work at the bottom of the decision-making hierarchy.

Next, I discuss the gender dynamics of INGOs' staffing, taking note of research that indicates a huge gender gap in favour of men in senior INGO leadership. This imbalance however is reversed when the focus is shifted to communication roles in the organisations, with women taking the lion's share of such positions. The possible reasons for and impact of these dynamics are discussed.

3.6.1 Geo-Political and Economic Power Bases

Because INGOs have their bases or headquarters in Western countries while their activities are largely focused on and based in the Global South (Terry, 2013; Dogra, 2012), the direct effect is a remarkably skewed balance of power in which the majority of their key decision-makers are Westerners while the Global South's citizens form the bulk of operational staffers (Abélès, 2008).

3.6.1.1 Staff Composition, Income Inequalities and Power

Even in their operational bases in the Global South, INGOs tend to hire Western expatriates in senior positions (Roth, 2015). A recent survey found that 57 per cent of country managers of global aid organisations are either European or North American (Knox Clarke, 2014). At operational level, 90 per cent of aid workers are national staffers, hired from and deployed within the countries receiving assistance from the INGOs (Roth, 2015). This disparity seems to feed into post-development critiques of the sector. Specifically, it seems to support the idea that development is not only a historically produced concept designed primarily by the West (Von Naso, 2018; Escobar, 1988) and with the same effect of supremacy of the West over the Global South (Escobar, 2011), but it also continues to feed into the perception that Europeans and Americans are more knowledgeable and able to lead than their African or Asian counterparts (Dossa, 2007).

However, because an overwhelming majority of operational roles are occupied by national staffers, INGOs are able to maintain an outward semblance of commitment to their normative values. Buzzwords such as 'partnership' and 'empowerment' are frequently used by INGOs to project a sense of equality between their donors or resource-rich offices in the West and the beneficiaries or implementing offices in the South. As has been pointed out, partnerships can be a “complex and clever signifier that conveys the radical idea of solidarity or equality while also meeting a neoliberal demand for contract, responsibility and self-interest” (Mosse, 2005:10) that “fits with a new business environment without losing old supporters” (Dahl, 2001:13). Using such descriptions to frame their work, INGOs can – and often do – go on to argue that they are achieving their stated goals of equality, equity or justice around the world, based on such statistics as the diversity of their employees in management and governance boards.

But these numbers can be misleading. There has, for instance, been a consistent increase in participatory approaches and diversity in INGO leadership. The 57 per cent figure of Western country managers is far better than in the 1980s and early 1990s when they totalled over 70 per cent (Roth, 2015:22). However, none of those non-Western country managers is in charge of a Western office. Political economy of INGO leadership is not simply about distribution of management roles, but also about the amount of influence these managers hold in the decision making process (Wasserman, 2018; Escobar, 2011; Crawford, 2003). So even though, for instance, there has been an increase in national hires for management positions in Southern offices of INGOs, the power to determine resource allocation, fundraising goals and communication objectives remains firmly in the hands of European and American offices.

To this end, and as a result of this dominance in leadership roles by Europeans and Americans, “Northern players dominate the knowledge economy of development NGOs and use this dominance to influence the shape and direction of development policies… despite an often genuine commitment to listening to the voices of their Southern partners, and to participation at all levels” (Mawdsley et al., 2002:2). This imbalance of power ultimately allows for the West to have what Crawford (2003:142) refers to as a “deeper penetration into national development choices” by rich countries over poor ones.

A related power issue within INGOs is income inequalities (Carr et al., 2010). As is the case for the corporate, for-profit sector, INGOs tend to have several expatriates – individuals deployed as experts in countries that they are not originally from or citizens of (Roth, 2015) – working for them. However, while expatriates from the South working in INGOs' headquarters in the North tend to receive salaries commensurate with their locally-hired colleagues within these offices, Western development workers who are deployed in Southern offices tend to be held to different standards wages from those of their locally-hired Southern counterparts (Roth, 2015; Carr et al., 1998). Not only do these expatriates – mostly Europeans and Americans – disproportionately occupy senior management positions (Roth, 2015; Dossa, 2007), a study also revealed that many earn up to 900 per cent more than their locally-hired counterparts (Carr et al., 2010). The study noted that these contrasting levels of salary tend not only to demotivate locally-hired staffers, but also "may be perpetuating poverty and injustice, not reducing them" (Carr et al., 2010:336). While these findings were not unique to INGOs, and the study included other sectors such as government, business and education, they are especially important to the development sector because they expose a contradiction between the universally-stated normative goals of development – such as poverty and income inequality reduction – and the reality of its implementation. Because the Western expatriates are citizens of developed economies, their higher pay elevates or at least maintains their income statuses and quality of life. On the other hand, locally-hired staffers who get paid less, yet do comparatively similar jobs, end up being demotivated and kept in a perpetual state of comparative disadvantage (Prilleltensky, 2003). As Lefkowitz points out, this is both ironic and unethical, especially among INGOs, whose programmes and initiatives are aimed at alleviating inequality (Lefkowitz, 2009).

On the other hand, while these power and relational inequalities require urgent attention, there is evidence to show that INGOs are faring better in comparison to the corporate sector when it comes to equality in staff remuneration. An earlier study showed that while income inequalities may be present within the INGO sector, they are even higher in the for-profit sector, with corporate executives earning up to thrice what their INGO counterparts earn in the US and UK (Werker and Ahmed, 2008). In other words, while the pay for expatriates may be larger compared to their colleagues hired nationally, it is sometimes less than they would be earning back home in the private sector. It is also important to note that Southern development workers who are employed in countries other their home countries are sometimes also paid as expatriates – though even they tend to earn less than Western expatriates (Carr et al., 2010). Defending the hefty salaries paid to charity executives in the West, Vicky Browning, who heads an association of charity CEOs, argued that given that many INGOs are large, complex organisations operating in very challenging circumstances, it was reasonable to expect that they be paid salaries commensurate to their skills, experience, level of responsibility and comparative to what they could get elsewhere (Ricketts, 2019). Another third sector worker observed that "there is a tension for trustees when it comes to setting senior pay in that they want to be seen as attractive to candidates but equally they are aware that people will go rooting through their annual accounts looking for unreasonably large pay packages" (Ricketts, 2019). However, Werker and Ahmed (2008) note that there are several INGOs that pay expatriates local wages yet still manage to attract talent.

3.6.1.2 Justifications for West-based INGO Headquarters

Another aspect of the geopolitical and economic structures of INGOs is the location of their headquarters and decision-making centres. The vast majority of INGOs have their headquarters in the West. There are also practical considerations that explain this, the most immediate of which is that this is where the resource mobilization takes place (Easterly, 2006; Moeller, 1999). A 2014 study of UK-based INGOs revealed that over 95 per cent of them relied on financial gifts from private donors and the general public to finance a significant portion of their work (Hailey, 2014). In the US, up to 40 per cent of the government's development aid to the Global South is channelled through INGOs (McCleary and Barro, 2008).

As DeMars succinctly puts it:

> [INGOs'] headquarters, funding, leadership and social base are typically located in the developed, capitalist democracies, while their activities are designed to influence populations in the Third World and former communist world… NGOs whose headquarters are based in Washington, New York, London or Paris enjoy a relative abundance of funding, expertise, technology, and access to political power. (DeMars 2004:43-44)

The relative political and economic stability of Europe and America are also strong justifications for INGOs to be based in the West (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010). Given that INGOs, by the very nature of their mandates, work in volatile, unstable and often unpredictable political environments (Wigley, 2005), it seems rational that their headquarters are based in areas that provide the stability of both political freedom to advocate for their causes and economic stability to fundraise, budget and project financial income. This argument is also usually extended to their regional hubs which tend to be based in the most economically thriving capitals. In Africa for instance, Dakar in Senegal, Nairobi in Kenya and Johannesburg in South Africa happen to host the largest number of INGO regional hubs. In explaining their choice of Nairobi as their new headquarters, Oxfam pointed out Kenya's relatively advanced infrastructure and political stability as some of the determining factors (Moorhead and Clarke, 2015).

However, researchers have pointed out that it is precisely because of these advantages that Western countries have over the South that equality and equity in the sector is elusive. Despite the beneficiaries of development initiatives being the biggest stakeholders – since it is their lives, livelihood and way of life that is being impacted on – it is those in resource-rich countries who control the decision-making process. As DeMars (2005:44) observes, "this is rarely an equal relationship, in spite of the language of partnership".

These geo-political and economic power bases in development reveal a picture consistent with what Douglas (2019:135) refers to as a kind of "racialised market rationality". That is, the justification and perpetuation of power and information imbalances based on the idea that because Western audiences are the main source of development aid, their interests and perspectives take precedence over those of the recipients of aid. From this perspective, even the increase in the number of Africans in INGO leadership and the shifting of headquarters by some from Western capitals to Africa are arguably decisions that were controlled by the Western offices. As this research later demonstrates, though symbolic and welcomed by many, these moves did not necessarily result in major power shifts.

However, an analysis of the five INGOs involved in this study reveals differing extents of inequality when it comes to the distribution of power. As the next section shows, some organisations have engaged in processes of restructuring that have seen not only a transfer of their headquarters from Western capitals to Africa but also a decentralisation of their governance structures into a federated system.

3.6.2 Gender-Based Power Bases

Ever since the 1975 UN World Conference on the status of women at which development practitioners and participating governments identified the elimination of gender discrimination as well as full participation of women in the development process as a critical goal (Roth, 2015), 'gender' has become "a plethora of competing meanings and agendas, shorthand for which the longhand has either been forgotten or was never really that clear in the first place"

(Cornwall, 2007:70). The related mantra, included in almost every INGO's programme objectives, is 'gender mainstreaming'. The UN defines gender mainstreaming as:

> A process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences in an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (UN Economic and Social Council, 1997)

Yet for all the verbal, legal and policy commitment made to gender mainstreaming, available evidence points to lackadaisical results and performance, even among INGOs. In 2014, research carried out on leadership representation within INGOs revealed that six out of every 10 country mangers was male (Knox Clarke, 2014). Another study, which focused on gender representations, found that while INGO global headquarters had a female workforce that formed 44 per cent of the staff, the representation worsened at regional headquarters, where it stood at just 27 per cent (Manola, 2014). In 2000 – a time when gender mainstreaming was a popular mantra that every development practitioner weaved into any and all reports (Porter and Sweetman, 2005) – not a single one of the 34 UN special representatives and envoys was female (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2000). While INGOs are at the forefront of advocating gender equity, the sector remains surprisingly male dominated, with another report even suggesting that the majority of the male workforce in the INGOs' Southern/field offices does not understand issues of gender (Roth, 2015). Cornwall (2007) argues that part of the reason this gender inequity exists lies in the use of the term 'gender' to depoliticise otherwise explosive and evocative debates about rights and power (Cornwall, 2007). Consequently, "its usage has become at times almost banal, leaving little scope for evoking either the outrage of injustice or indeed the entrenchment of inequity within the very workings of the development industry –

let alone in the everyday lives of the people about whom development agencies profess to be concerned" (Cornwall, 2007:70).

The story is not all bleak though. The rhetoric and policy changes towards gender mainstreaming have resulted in creating a favourable space for women to work within the development sector in general and INGOs in particular (White, 2006) and in some instances, such as MSF Holland, the majority of those employed: 57 per cent were women and even managerial representation was at a respectable 45 per cent (Damman et al., 2014).

Moreover, in the communications sub-field, women make up 62.5 per cent of executive positions in INGOs' headquarters, as opposed to only 33 per cent within the private sector (Manola, 2014). There have also been a number of appointments of women to high-profile global leadership positions in INGOs such as Save the Children, Oxfam and World Vision (Roth, 2015). Not only do such actions raise the profile and involvement of women in the decision making processes of INGOs, they also act as powerful motivators for gender equality, demystifying these positions and encouraging women and girls globally to aspire to positions hitherto reserved for men (Eyben, 2007).

These positive indicators however also contrast starkly with the revelations of misogyny and gender-based abuses against women in INGOs over the past five years. In 2016, Oxfam recorded a total of 87 staff-on-staff sexual abuse cases, the highest number registered by the charity at the time (Watt, 2017). All the victims were women. The next year, Oxfam and Save the Children again made headlines as it was reported that some of their employees were involved in child prostitution and sex-for-aid racquets in Haiti as well as sexual harassment of female employees in Chad (Scurlock et al., 2020; Elgot and McVeigh, 2018). A survey of over 1000 development workers also revealed that 87 per cent of those asked knew of a colleague –

almost always female – who had experienced sexual abuse, with 41 per cent having witnessed it themselves (Watt, 2017).

The mixed information available about the status of gender power relations within INGOs is perhaps an indicator of two realities regarding gender power bases in the sector: first, that there is a disconnect between INGO normative values regarding gender and the practical realities (Roth, 2015; Cornwall, 2007; Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Porter and Sweetman, 2005). The position of women in INGOs and development is precarious and in many ways a continuation of the inequality and power imbalance they face elsewhere. The second is that in spite of this disconnect, INGOs are significantly ahead of their private sector counterparts in terms of gender mainstreaming both at managerial and operational levels (Damman et al., 2014; Manola, 2014; Eyben, 2007; White, 2006). This is particularly true of INGO Communications, which is dominated by women both in the Global South and in Western countries. The reasons for this make for critical and interesting research, particularly given the #MeToo era in which we now live. They are however, beyond the scope of this research, which interrogates the story production processes of INGOs. However, the extent of power that women in INGO communications possess, and the ways in which it is used, are critical aspects of the research.

3.7 Organisational Insecurity and Tension among INGOs

INGOs are significant players in setting and determining societal normative values, especially in the Third World (Stroup and Wong, 2016; Abélès, 2008; Castells, 2008; Mitlin et al., 2007; DeMars, 2005; Mawdsley et al., 2002; Finnemore, 1996; Ndegwa, 1996). INGOs are also often seen as social and cultural intermediaries, helping to bridge the knowledge and resource gaps between developed and developing countries (Yanacopulos, 2015a; Roche and Hewett, 2013). Castells describes civil society (in which INGOs lie) as the organized expression of citizens' articulated "autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society" (Castells, 2008:78), envisioning civil society as an integral bridge of political expression in the public square. The surge in the number of INGOs over the past half century appears to be in line with this thinking. Between 1960 – when the number of registered INGOs stood at 1,000 – and 1996, 4500 new INGOs were formed (Simmons, 1998). In the UK alone, a 2004 study put the number of registered INGOs at 600, with over 50 per cent having been registered in the decade preceding the turn of the millennium. This influx of INGOs and their partner NGOs has been largely welcomed as a sign of progress towards liberal normative values and democracy (Dogra, 2012; Finnemore, 1996). This, however, is not necessarily the case, as discussed in the next section.

3.7.1 Inter-organisational Contestation

Recent research is revealing that far from concretising the normative values of development, the influx of INGOs, coupled with the increasing use of for-profit consulting companies by donor agencies in development projects, more often results in INGOs compromising normative values, in favour of whatever action is necessary to expand their reach, secure funding, or maintain their dominance over other INGOs (White, 2020; Cooley and Ron, 2002). As far back as 2010, for-profit development consultancy firms were winning more grants and funding from donor agencies than INGOs. In the UK, for example, 20 out of 25 contracts awarded by the Department for International Development went to consulting firms (Huysentruyt, 2011). In the US, Casey (2016:3) noted that "US, Chemonics, John Snow Inc. and Abt Associates, are major players in aid and development, but have a much lower public profile than their non-profit counterparts such as Oxfam, World Vision, or Save the Children". These companies have a huge presence in East Africa and manage multi-million-dollar contracts on behalf of USAID, DFID and other such donor agencies.

A possible reason for the relative invisibility of development consulting firms is that, unlike INGOs, they do not engage in organisational branding, advocacy or other such public promotional efforts. Since they are profit-making companies, they also do not engage in fundraising campaigns that seek membership, subscription or sponsorship from the general public. Instead, these companies lobby and bid for contracts from large government development agencies like USAID, DFID, DANIDA and FinAid as well as private foundations/funds such as the Global Fund and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Casey, 2016). This means that INGOs face a two-pronged challenge when it comes to competition within the sector. On the one hand, they are constantly competing with other INGOs for the limited coverage devoted to development and humanitarian work by the media, and on the other hand, they increasingly have to compete with private consulting firms for public financing.

This is forcing INGOs to use their communication efforts primarily as fundraising, branding or promotional tools rather than advocacy or information channels that centre the voices and needs of those they seek to serve. For instance, a study of selected INGOs' operations in Kenya showed that they often used their "financial strength and access to economic and political elites in order to subvert what should be representative economic processes" (Norton-Griffiths, 2010). As Cooley and Ron significantly noted, "the transnational environment is pushing INGOs toward greater competition, regardless of their normative starting points or orientations" (Cooley and Ron, 2002:7).

3.7.2 Intra-Organisational Contestation

Even internally, INGOs are grappling with issues of identity and purpose. Wright (2018), for instance, has demonstrated how Christian Aid, in an effort to be more efficient, let go of a third of its communications staffers and merged several departments such as marketing, media and advocacy. The former head of marketing was appointed to lead the new communications department, sparking off internal debate about the extent of the organisation's commitment to adopting a more participatory, bottom-up way of working. Those against the move saw the appointment of a marketing professional to head communications as a prioritisation of fundraising over a devolution of power in the story production process. Indeed the main reason for the restructure was the continued reduction in the organisation's supporters (Wright, 2018:107).

On the other hand, the organisation also adopted internal processes that allowed country-level staffers in offices like Kenya to not only initiate the deployment of media teams from the London headquarters but also gave them power to veto any media items created by such teams. This was seen by some within the organisation as a progressive, participatory, bottom-up system. And yet, as one staff member observed, this was a "largely cosmetic" policy as other factors such as fast news production processes and news cycles often "meant that extensive editorial consultation with in-country staff was usually impossible" or "belated" (Andrew Hogg in Wright, 2018:108)

3.7.3 Development Logic in the Dock

The development narrative is that there are resource-poor countries – largely found in the Global South – and resource-rich countries – mostly in the Global North – with the former receiving aid from the latter. This donor-recipient relationship has crystalized into a largely unchallenged 'fact', in much the same way as the narrative of Afro-pessimism is uncritically repeated. However, there is a growing recognition among academics and practitioners that this view is neither wholly accurate nor sustainable. Research by Global Financial Integrity (GFI) and the Centre for Applied Research indicates that far from receiving financial resources from the West (in the form of aid, foreign investment, trade, debt cancellation, remittances, and capital flight), the Global South was losing financial resources (Global Financial Integrity, 2012). In 2012 alone, the Global South received $1.3 trillion while losing $3.3 trillion, thereby registering a net financial loss of $2.3 trillion. As Hickel (2017:164) observes, this loss is largely in the form of profits repatriated by multinationals, external debt repayment and capital flight, with over $200 billion going back to rich nations as payment of grants and loans given to poor nations. In Africa, even after the cancellation of foreign debt by rich countries in 2005, most nations – including those categorized as middle-income such as Nigeria – are back to being heavily indebted (Amadi et al., 2020). Were (2018) notes that the average debt-to-GDP ratio for African countries hit 30 per cent in 2012 and had surpassed 50 per cent by 2017.

Even more worrying for observers is the rising trend of African countries borrowing from China. While China offers loans to Africa with less stringent conditions in regard to respecting human rights by governments and other such parameters, China tends to condition its assistance on managing multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and mining projects. This too has resulted in enormous capital flight and loss of agency on the part of African governments as China takes over the management of these projects in lieu of payment (Alden and Jiang, 2019; Were, 2018). By 2018, 23 per cent of Africa's total debt was to China, with countries such as Djibouti and Kenya having as much as 57 and 27 per cent of their national debt owed to it.

While this is not necessarily a direct consequence of INGOs or their operations in Africa, it is in part a result of policy agendas proposed by the same rich nations that fund them. These statistics also fly in the face of a development narrative that projects the West as generous benefactor of the Global South. In spite of all the work done within the development sector, these numbers demonstrate that more money leaves countries like Uganda and Kenya to the West than comes in. And while advocacy INGOs such as Oxfam, Action Aid and Save the

Children actively campaign for foreign debt relief, their participation in the development agenda politics in many ways enables, sustains and legitimizes the questionable donor-recipient narrative, which in turn perpetuates several components of Afro-pessimism.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the various contestations of international development's origin, operation and structure. I show that INGOs are inextricably linked to the continent's colonial past, which complicates their ability to achieve their stated goals. I also discuss the lack of conceptual clarity in defining INGOs and what it is that they actually do – a complication brought about by the wide range of issues they work on and the relationships they forge in order to do so. The latter, I argue, compels INGOs to operate in ways that are inconsistent with their stated normative values and objectives, instead perpetuating colonial power relations between the African communities they seek to impact and the Western audiences that finance them. I also argue that their operational structures perpetuate top-down relationships between their offices in Africa and those in the West. I then discuss the specific governance structures of the five INGOs involved in this research, showing how some of them have sought to reconceptualise their governance structures in response to calls for a more participatory approach to development. While there are significant developments in this regard, I argue that in some cases the changes are cosmetic and do little to change or challenge what Douglas (2019) refers to as 'racialised market rationality'. I also discuss the various insecurities and tensions driving INGOs' inter- and intra-organisational contestations. Finally, I engage with data which contradicts popular narratives that project the West as generous benefactors of the South. Instead, evidence shows that the Global South – and Africa in particular – loses vast amounts of financial resources to the West in the form of external debt repayment, illicit capital flight and profit repatriation by multinational companies. I also briefly discuss the emergence of China as a major financial player and donor in Africa and make the argument that while none of these are the fault of INGOs, they reflect a continuation of an inequitable, Afro-pessimistic agenda that INGOs legitimise through their continued engagement with and promotion of the current development agenda.

In the next chapter, I explore INGOs' media logic and the influence promotional culture has had on their communication efforts.

4 Media Logic, Promotional Culture and Conceptualising INGO Communication

4.1 Introduction

Having problematised the history, structures and operations of INGOs, this chapter establishes the thesis' theoretical framework. I do this in three ways. First, I discuss three dominant theories used in INGOs and development communication: media logic, promotional culture, and mediatisation. I particularly engage with the ways in which existing research relates each of these phenomena to communications efforts within the development sector. Second, I argue that while these theories provide useful insights into the nature of current INGOs communication, they do not on their own provide the analytical tools necessary to explain why Afro-pessimism persists in INGO literature. Specifically, I argue that they do not sufficiently acknowledge and/or appreciate the roles individual agency and reflexivity play in both the perpetuation and challenge of Afro-pessimism in INGO communication. As an alternative – and for the purpose of a more comprehensive analysis – I propose the integration of moral economy theory into INGO communication. Through showing how this approach is gaining traction within development studies, I argue that its adoption extends this research beyond boon or bane arguments about Afro-pessimism, allowing for a greater appreciation of how INGOs at both organisational and individual level justify or rationalise their use of essentialised, racialised, selective or predictive language while communicating their work in Africa to Western audiences. I argue that this is particularly useful to this project, which specifically highlights locally-based African INGO communication professionals' positions as intermediaries between not just INGOs and their various audiences, but also between Western news media, Western INGO offices and the beneficiaries of their work.

4.2 Applications of Media Logic, Mediatisation and Promotional Culture to INGO Communication Research

In this section, I introduce the concepts of media logic, mediatisation and promotional culture, establishing the various ways in which researchers have applied them to INGO communications studies. I enumerate the benefits of such research approaches before highlighting some of the gaps they leave and proposing ways to mitigate them.

4.2.1 Media Logic

Media logic is a concept that was first proposed by Altheide and Snow (1979). As a conceptual framework, it posits that messages and the media through which they are created and sent tend to follow particular patterns or formats. These patterns are adapted as normative processes by both those constructing the messages as well as those receiving them. More recently, Althheide has provided a more detailed definition:

> Media logic refers to the assumptions and processes for constructing messages within a particular medium. This includes rhythm, grammar, and format… This logic – or the rationale, emphasis, and orientation promoted by media production, processes, and messages – tends to be evocative, encapsulated, highly thematic, familiar to audiences, and easy to use. (Altheide, 2004)

Although originally used in the study of mass media's impact on political communication, the concept has in recent years been used to explain a wide range of changes in institutional and social behaviour as a result of the mass media's conceptualisation and projection of news (Thimm et al., 2018). It has been used to study the effect media has had on the ways in which sports, religious and political institutions are structured as they attempt to fit into the mass media's predetermined assumptions, processes and formats of what is newsworthy (Splendore and Mazzoleni, 2017; Altheide, 2004; Duncan and Brummett, 1987). Splendore (2014), on the other hand, has used the theoretical understanding of media logic to demonstrate how Italian media producers localise reality television and determine what constitutes entertainment value for their audiences, eventually affecting/influencing the audiences' expectation of what reality television consists of.

Taking this wider perspective of the term into consideration, Hjarvard (2008:113) proposed that media logic should be understood as "the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules". Media logic can therefore be understood as being concerned with two main aspects: the production processes of media content, and the effects various media have on a range of institutions.

Because INGOs are now institutionalised agents of development that participate in political, social and economic processes globally, they are increasingly sought after by the media. This is not just because of their work in places like Africa, but also because of their stature. For instance, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision are regular participants at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, influencing the agendas of both Western and African governments through high level advocacy and campaigning (Bayne and Woolcock, 2011). In 2016 alone, Oxfam's involvement in Davos resulted in over 5,000 mentions in the media across 93 countries, over 110,000 new supporters in under a week, and a report that graphically detailed how one per cent of the world's richest individuals were richer than the rest of the world, which was a dominant feature of the conference (Oxfam-International, 2016).

INGOs are therefore dependent on media exposure and engagement for fundraising and advocacy. The institutionalised nature of INGOs' involvement in national and international politics make it inevitable that they regularly engage the media with the double aims of furthering or maintaining their brand recognition and gaining or retaining their legitimacy. This constant interaction between the media and INGOs has resulted in an interdependence that has far-reaching implications for both sectors, not least of which is the adoption of media logic by INGOs.

Adopting media logic negatively impacts INGOs' ability to stay true to their normative humanitarian values. As they try to gain publicity, INGOs "adapt to news norms that give journalists and government officials the upper hand in defining what counts as news" (Powers, 2018:5). With their large budgets, INGOs are in a position to – and frequently do – hire former journalists, branding and public relations professionals as well as freelance reporters to generate stories whose technical quality (resolution of photographs and videos, writing style and focus) are able to appeal to and be used by major mass media outlets (Powers, 2015, 2014; Chouliaraki, 2013).

However, Powers (2018) points out that this adaption to media logic has the (unintended) consequence of INGO communication efforts mirroring rather than expanding or challenging the news media agenda. And because this interactivity with the media is the primary concern of INGO communication, alternative forms of public engagement such as social media and websites are used only as secondary platforms. Even then, these platforms are more often than not used to engage with journalists and in dealing with reputational concerns (Powers, 2018, 2017). Stroup and Wong (2017) also conclude that INGOs use social media platforms to complement their core public engagement strategies rather than pursue new ones.

4.2.1.1 The Increasing Centrality of Media Logic in INGO Communications

The primary goals of INGO communication to Western audiences are to inform or educate them about what the charities are doing, the progress or challenges being faced, and the ways in which they (Western audiences) can contribute towards predetermined solutions, policy changes or development objectives (Stroup and Wong, 2016; Dogra, 2012; Waisbord, 2011;

Madon, 1999; Najam, 1996). In some cases, this communication is also intended as an advocacy tool to influence Western governments' policies or public opinion (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018b; Bunce et al., 2016; Franks, 2013). For instance, Franks (2013) details instances in which the British government's international aid policies as well as the public's attitude and media agenda were often influenced by the portrayal of the 1984 Ethiopian famine.

To achieve this, INGOs increasingly have to establish strong relationships with the media (Powers, 2017). This has often required that they collaborate with the media in innovative ways that on the one hand expands on media coverage of certain issues while on the other blurs the lines between journalism and activism (Wright, 2015; Cooper, 2009). An oft-cited example of what this can look like is the Katine Community Collaborative project. Based in small village in Uganda, this project was a collaboration between Africa Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), Care International, Farm Africa and *The Guardian* newspaper. It aimed to both engage in and report about an agreed-upon development project or as *The Guardian* editor, Alan Rusbridger put it, to use the Internet "as a hinge between the people in Africa who have the need, and the people in developed countries who have the resources" (Brooks, 2012:36). While the Katine project is often touted as the ideal model for media partnership with INGOs owing to the explicit agreement of total transparency that the INGOs involved in the process guaranteed *The Guardian* newspaper (Brooks, 2012; Jones, 2010), it is by no means a reflection of what usually happens. More often, what can and cannot be covered by the media as well as the role played by the journalists covering INGO activities is not clearly defined (Wright, 2015). As Franks (2013) observed of the Western media's coverage of the Ethiopian famine of 1984, the media often abandoned their independence and watchdog role in a bid to outcompete rival media outlets on a story.

More recently, research by Wright (2017) showed how even small, Africa-based NGOs could conscript large Western legacy media into uncritical publication of stories about their (INGOs') projects. She documented the various ways in which the Kenyan Paraplegic Organisation (KPO) was able to enlist several prestigious news outlets, including the BBC, Al Jazeera and *The New York Times*, in publishing photos and stories about, a Kenyan paraplegic, Zack Kimotho, who raised over half a million pounds by wheeling himself from Kenya to South Africa for spinal surgery. What went unnoticed or unreported by the media were the various economic interests of both the NGO and participating corporate organisations that were at the core of the project. As Wright notes, the advertising and telecom companies involved in the project "deliberately crafted a value-laden and emotive story about Kenyan self-help and empowerment, while simultaneously maintaining interpretative control over the campaign in ways that served their own economic interests" (Wright, 2017:155).

Whether this ability to engage and use the media in pursuing their financial and advocacy goals is a positive development or not is a matter of much academic debate (Scott et al., 2018; Powers, 2017; Abbott, 2015; Yanacopulos, 2015b; Beckett, 2011; Fenton, 2010). What this chapter points to, however, is that INGOs are increasingly adjusting their organisational operations to media logic as a way of engaging with and attracting media coverage of their programmes.

Media logic theory therefore enables researchers to explore the ways in which INGO communication strategies interact with, affect, and are affected by the media. It also helps explain tensions between these organisations' normative ideals and practice. It allows for an understanding of how these organisations, in conjunction with the media, interpret and actualise 'proper distance', defined by Silverstone (2013:47) as "the more or less precise degree of proximity required in mediated interrelationships if we are to create and sustain a sense of the other sufficient not just for reciprocity but for a duty of care, obligation and responsibility, as well as understanding".

4.2.2 Mediatisation

It was not until the late 1980s that Asp (1986:356) used the term "mediatisation" to refer to the high degree of influence mass media had on political systems such that politicians had to adjust their messages and style of delivery to attract media coverage. However, as Hjarvard (2008) pointed out, Gudmund Hernes had earlier begun investigating the power of media to "redistribute power in society" (Hernes, 1978:181). Since then, several scholars have built on these perspectives of the term, demonstrating an increased dependence on the media by politicians and political systems in Brazil, Italy and the UK (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999) as well as the "complex, active and performative ways that the media are involved in conflicts" (Cottle, 2006:9). Weingart (1998) investigates the term in light of the increasing dependence of science on media and public acceptance, thus speaking of the "mediatisation of science" (Weingart, 1998:872).

While these researchers focus on different aspects of mediatisation, there is a general consensus that it relates to the growing influence media has on society beyond just mediation. As Cottle (2006:9) puts it:

> 'Mediation' tends to suggest a view of media as a neutral 'middle-ground', equidistant perhaps between events that the media report on and the audiences that view/read/hear about them. Implicit to this view of 'mediation', then, is a view of media 'conveyance' or 'transmission' as well as, possibly, an 'arbitrating' role – again often neutrally conceived.

Mediatisation as a theory therefore perceives the media as not just a passive tool of communication, but as an impactful and engaged actor in both the transmission and formation of human knowledge. Hjarvard (2008:113) defines it as "the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic".

As discussed in Chapter 2,[5] INGOs are intermediaries that on the one hand connect resource-poor (developing) countries to resource-rich (developed) ones and on the other, provide the resource-rich countries with knowledge about the developing ones (Yanacopulos, 2015b). This intermediary role takes many forms, including fundraising, advocacy and policy implementation, all of which involve the use of and engagement with media.

This engagement, like other aspects of social interaction discussed above, has been impacted by mediatisation. Indeed, research into the ways in which INGOs have impacted or been impacted by their interaction with the media is a growing field of media and journalism studies. For instance, the boundaries between INGOs and journalists are being blurred as the latter increasingly look to the former for news content (Wright (2018); (Abbott, 2015; Rothmyer, 2011; Beckett, 2009). Conversely, INGOs are being shown to be increasingly dependent on the media in achieving their normative goals, sometimes even to the detriment and abandonment of their normative moral values (Chouliaraki, 2008) as well as their standing in the public eye (Seu, 2015).

To conceptualize the various aspects of mediatisation, Schulz (2004:98) proposes four processes of change that it effects:

> First, the media extend the natural limits of human communication capacities; second, the media substitute social activities and social institutions; third, media amalgamate with various non-media activities in social life; and fourth, the actors and organisations of all sectors of society accommodate to the media logic.

Building on these concepts, Hjarvard (2008:131) argues that in order to understand the precise ways in which mediatisation impacts various areas of society, what is required is an empirical observation of the "interplay of institutions and media in a historical and cultural context". Like media logic theories, therefore, mediatisation is often studied at an institutional level, with a

[5] See section 2.5.2

heavy focus on the impact of news media values, logic and processes on organisations or sectors. In specific regard to INGO communications, mediatisation theories also help to deconstruct and understand the sector's increasing focus on reputation management. The next section discusses this in further detail.

4.2.2.1 Mediatisation and INGO Reputational Considerations

Because a considerable amount of their funding comes from public donations, INGOs are increasingly committing significant amounts of their budgets to public relations, marketing and media campaigns (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018a; Scott et al., 2018; Davis, 2013). Between 2016-2017, World Vision, Save the Children, Christian Aid, Oxfam and Plan International all spent ten per cent or more of their annual budgets on fundraising and marketing campaigns (Plan International, 2018; Christian Aid, 2017; World Vision, 2017a; Save the Children, 2016a).[6]

These significant amounts of money are ostensibly used for dual purposes: first to reach millions of potential supporters in Western countries in the hope of raising more money. Secondly, these campaigns also aim to inform the public of the INGOs' work in places like Africa, thereby providing some sense of accountability for the resources being asked for. In several instances, these targeted audiences' only exposure to news about Sub-Saharan Africa in many weeks will be the stories told in the INGOs' newsletters, fundraising packs, and other such advocacy packs (Orgad, 2015; Dogra, 2012; Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Clifford, 2005).

[6] It is important to note that while INGO fundraising and marketing campaigns use stories, videos and photographs from places they operate in (such as East Africa), the production of most of these stories itself is not categorised as fundraising and marketing but rather as part of their programme implementation. This is because many of these resources are generated by communications workers hired as part of the programme implementation staff and are therefore paid as such. The costs of using these stories for public engagement campaigns is categorised as fundraising and marketing.

However, as has been pointed out by a prominent development theorist, “the work of global development is not just in the funding, but in the doing of development” (Wilkins, 2018:76). She notes that when the performance of development becomes more a matter of looking good (other than doing good), then the goal of doing well may be sacrificed. Negative media coverage of INGOs can have significant and long-lasting implications on the organisation concerned. Therefore, apart from being focused on showcasing the work they do to their various publics, INGO communications efforts are also aimed at creating, sustaining or regaining a particular public image (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018a).

A case in point is the story that broke in February 2018 of senior Oxfam and Save the Children officials hiring prostitutes in Haiti and Central African Republic respectively. Within a week, Oxfam had lost 7,094 individual donors, accounting for up to 3.5 per cent of such benefactors (Elgot and McVeigh, 2018). Similarly, Save the Children was forced to engage in damage control over its senior staff members’ alleged conduct in Central African Republic (Elgot and McVeigh, 2018). Several governments halted funding for the organisations and lawmakers demanded more accountability from them. The story also resulted in the establishment of a commission of inquiry into Oxfam’s workplace practices (Carolei, 2018) and a report that was highly critical of how complaints about sexual misconduct had been handled (Prakash, 2019). This criticism demonstrated not only the gap between the organisation’s public image and reality, but also the precarious contexts in which women in development operate, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In another instance, an American INGO, Invisible Children, used a documentary and other promotional activities to raise their hitherto low profile into the global limelight. The documentary detailed a highly emotive interaction between the organisation’s founder, Jason Russell, and Jason Acaye, one of the victims of a rebel group in Uganda known as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Russell promises Acaye that he will trigger the arrest and prosecution of Joseph Kony, the leader of LRA. As a way of keeping his promise, Russell proposes the use of various promotional activities to make Kony and his atrocities famous, thereby increasing the chances of US politicians prioritising the capture and prosecution of the warlord (Bex and Craps, 2016). Alongside the documentary, Invisible Children sold Kony 2012 memorabilia and harnessed the media power of US celebrities and social media to hitherto unseen effect. Within a week, the organisation had raised over $30 million, received the backing of several US politicians and celebrities and thrust the organisation and its agenda to the top of international news coverage for days (Nothias, 2013; Basu, 2012; Goodman and Preston, 2012).

However, although there was a spike in revenue, the organisation quickly became the target of media criticism for what was viewed by many as a disingenuous, simplistic and decontextualized narrative of the decades-old war in northern Uganda (Von Engelhardt and Jansz, 2014; Gregory, 2012). Not only had there been no attacks by the Lord's Resistance Army in more than half a decade, the documentary was highlighted as just another example of the 'white saviour complex' that critics have accused most INGOs of having (Bex and Craps, 2016).

In both instances of promotional activity, media attention was drawn to the ideals of the organisations, with the negative publicity focusing on their failure to uphold them. Very little focus was put on positive coverage of work that the INGOs were engaged in, a result that ran contrary to the original intentions of the organisations' promotional campaigns. It was this disconnect between intention and result that led Mark Goldring, Oxfam's Chief Executive, to insist that the negative reactions by the public and media were unfair and disproportionate to the organisation's culpability (BBC, 2018a). He insisted that the overwhelming majority of the organisation's staff were honourable people and that the loss in revenue was going to hurt the poorest most.

Ironically, even this defence of the organisation was most effectively communicated through the very media channels that were being perceived as providing unfair coverage. This confirms scholars' charges that INGOs are increasingly impacted by mediatisation and are having to adapt to an era in which the media is not only plays a mediation role, but also actively engages with and impacts on INGO work in ways that have real consequences.

For better or worse, INGOs are heavily reliant on the media to not only communicate their messages to global audiences, but also for fundraising and advocacy. However, promotional activities and their increasing indispensability in development work end up becoming a double-edged sword with which INGOs are both praised and criticised, celebrated and vilified by the media and their audiences. Also, INGOs are prone to myriad pitfalls, ranging from embarrassing gaffes by their representatives to damning reports about corruption, unethical behaviour, or other public relations crises.

The tension between the pros and cons of INGO media engagement is akin to the chicken-egg quandary. The more prominent an organisation's profile becomes in the media and public eye, the more liable it becomes to bad press and significant financial damage as a result of it. To help mitigate the negative eventualities, INGOs invest heavily in hiring media managers and public relations professionals (Cottle, 2015; Dogra, 2007). Many of these professionals are ex-journalists (Powers, 2014; Franks, 2013) who get hired on the basis of their vast experience with and networks in the media or promotional cultures industry (Davis, 2013). As a result, increased promotional activity by INGOs is a function of both practical necessity and composition/competencies of the communications staffers.

4.2.3 Promotional Culture

Linked to media logic and mediatisation is the concept of promotional culture. Originally proposed in the early 1990s, the term 'promotional culture' was used to refer to the normalizing of commodifying, advertising and promoting of people, ideas and organisations as an integral part of life (Wernick, 1991). More recently, Davis (2013:3) proposed a narrower definition of the term, using it in reference to what he saw as a trend in which "active promotional practices are rather more widespread and systematic than they once were". Behind these practices are professional practitioners working within the industries of public relations (PR), marketing, advertising, lobbying/advocacy and branding, whose job it is to support, encourage or further the progress of clients, their ideas or products. These are also known as promotional intermediaries (Davis, 2013; Aronczyk and Powers, 2010).

While the promotional culture has largely been studied with a focus on more traditional promotional industries such as PR, advertising and lobbying, the rise in branding, communication and fundraising activities within the development sector, particularly with INGOs, is fast becoming a major research area within journalism studies (Kothari, 2018; Powers, 2017; Wright, 2015; Hailey, 2014; Abbott, 2009), public relations and marketing (Davis, 2013; Aronczyk and Powers, 2010; Wernick, 1991). Ossewaarde et al. (2008), for instance, conducted a study of the ways in which ten INGOs, including World Vision, Save the Children and Christian Aid, responded to the 2004 Tsunami in Indonesia. They observed that, on the one hand, INGOs constantly face the need to 'organise' – to mobilise resources, global support and operational competencies necessary to do their work. On the other hand, this operational reality forces them to betray their core missions and normative values. The tension between the two poses the risk that INGOs will find themselves unable to meet their financial and operational needs without abandoning their normative values. They put it this way:

> INGOs need to organise their motives through developing professional monitoring and accountability mechanisms. These require a technical expertise that typically identifies with the processes of an organisation, instead of humanity at large. Hence, the more is demanded from the INGO as an organisation, the more powerful managers and experts become, the less the organisation's ideal is stamped. The external organisational threats to INGO legitimacy follow from the social relations with stakeholders. The core missions of INGOs can hence come in conflict with the necessity to attain funds and join capacities with other actors in order to be effective. (Ossewaarde et al., 2008:51)

4.2.3.1 The Financial Logic behind INGO Promotional Strategies

The most basic premise of INGO operations is that members of the public voluntarily subscribe to and support – financially, morally and logistically – the causes for which these charities exist. This inevitably means that to make ends meet financially, INGOs must constantly find ways of recruiting members, supporters and donors. While there have been other factors that have influenced the growth of promotional activities among INGOs, none is as clear cut and well demonstrated as the financial incentive. A 2014 study of UK-based INGOs, for instance, revealed that over 95 per cent of them relied on financial gifts from private donors and the general public to finance a significant portion of their work. For the most part, these financiers were enlisted through public appeals, media campaigns and other such media-dependent fundraising drives (Hailey, 2014).

Save the Children, for example, had a 2016 budget of £405m. A third of this (£120m) came from donations and legacies that were a direct result of promotional activities on the part of the organisation (Save the Children, 2016a). Another £271m came from government and international organisations' grants and financial partnerships. For most of this money, the organisation had to pitch proposals or compete with other INGOs. This inevitably required generating promotional activities, materials and information to make the case for the organisation being picked over other bidders. Trading and investment activities accounted for only 3.5 per cent (£14m) of the organisation's income. Even then, their charity shops and online trading platforms relied heavily on branding, advertising and lobbying to attract clients.

Similar trends can be seen with other INGOs. More than half of World Vision's billion dollar budget (54%) came through private cash contributions by individual donors (World Vision, 2017a). Twenty-two per cent came in the form of gifts-in-kind and the rest from public funds that they had to bid for. At Oxfam, more than three quarters of the Secretariat's budget was generated from "charitable activities, donations and legacies" (Oxfam, 2016).

These financial records reveal that not only INGOs' heavy dependence on financial contributions from members of the general public, but also just how important promotional activities are to their survival. As Davis (2013:154) puts it:

> In recent decades a range of public institutions, organised interest groups, charities and social movements have adopted promotional personnel and practices. These have become vital for communicating with publics, members and funders. They are also centrally involved in forms of promotional conflict as organisations try and compete to influence political and media agendas. Thus, society-based promotional struggle has become a feature of modern democracies.

In the African context, the successful fundraising that resulted from media coverage of the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s appears to have been the earliest, most significant merging of promotional culture and INGO work. In many ways, it was one of the most consequential post-colonial humanitarian crises in Africa. Mo Amin's and Michael Buerk's harrowing pictures and footage of emaciated children and rotting livestock translated a tragedy happening in a far off place into an emergency that demanded action. Franks (2013) argues that the media coverage of the famine and suffering not only shocked the world into wanting to help but resulted in an unprecedented surge of financial donations to INGOs working in Eastern Africa.

Over time, researchers and development practitioners alike have come to identify it as one of the defining moments in the evolution of INGOs in Africa (Müller, 2013; Franks, 2010;

Dicklitch, 1998), with one even referring to it as “an earthquake in the humanitarian world” (De Waal, 1997:106). One of the key reasons for this is that the media coverage of the famine resulted in a surge of funding for INGOs, beginning a partnership that has since been praised and criticised in equal measure. Since then, INGOs have increasingly sought to increase their media presence and interaction as a core part of their fundraising and advocacy strategies (Scott et al., 2018; Wright, 2017).

Reflecting on this relationship, Franks (2013) notes that following the media coverage, some INGOs saw their income from public donations increase twofold in a matter of days, although she goes on to clarify that this was not the only reason for the rapid rise in the number of INGOs:

> In addition, there was all the funding that came into the voluntary sector from newly established Band Aid and Live Aid enterprises. Thirdly, there were the donations to the NGOs from governments and official agencies which were starting to see the Third Sector as a way of reaching their goals. The rise in the overall income from these various sources eventually translated into institutional growth. (Franks, 2013:134)

This influx in terms of both the number and size of INGOs working in Africa had the further knock-on effect of institutionalising the individual organisations’ growth as well as the expansion of the development sector generally (Anyangwe, 2016; Franks, 2013; Atack, 1999). INGOs now not only needed to fundraise for the specific humanitarian crises they were responding to, but they also needed to raise the necessary funds to sustain their increased organisational footprint. Oxfam for instance entered the 1980s with a little over 400 employees and by 1990 had almost tripled that number (Black, 1992).

As they extended their presence and scope in Africa, INGOs became the drivers of what came to be known as 'Alternative Development'[7] (Ndegwa, 1996:17). Western countries preferred to channel their funding to African countries through INGOs, given their (real or perceived) transparency, accountability, local presence and interaction with the target population and stated normative goals (Matanga, 2010; Hulme and Edwards, 1997). INGOs' legitimacy, therefore, depends directly on the extent to which they are seen to fit these constructs as agents of Alternative Development. Funding the promotional practices that achieve this end ultimately became an integral part of their organisational structure.

Promotional culture theories and studies therefore help researchers to understand not only how promotional activities impact INGO operations and relationships with stakeholders but also the effect they have on INGOs fidelity to their normative values. However, analysing INGO media logic from an institutional perspective leaves several gaps in our understanding of these organisations' operations. This is because institutional decisions are a consequence of several personal or individual choices made by employees in response to not only media logic but several other external and internal influences. In the next section, I discuss the importance of individual agency in INGO communications and make the case for the adoption of other theories and approaches within this research subfield.

[7] The term Alternative Development was initially used to refer to the idea of pursuing socio-economic progress of nations and people primarily through NGOs rather than the state. As the postcolonial years in most parts of Africa were seen to be dominated by civil and political unrest, grand state corruption and a lack of institutional capacity on the part of governments to effect development agendas, Western countries turned to INGOs as more reliable implementers of the development projects they were funding. For more on this, refer to DICKLITCH, S. 1998. *The elusive promise of NGOs in Africa: Lessons from Uganda*, Springer. and HULME, D. & EDWARDS, M. 1997. Too close for comfort? NGOs, states and donors. *St. Martin's Press. Londres*.

4.3 The Role of Individual Agency and Reflexivity in INGO Communications

While INGOs may be forced to adopt a media logic aligned to journalistic concepts of what is newsworthy, the frequency with which INGO stories get picked up by news media is often dependent on other factors such as the individual capabilities of their communications employees. These may include the professional relationships between INGO communications staffers and journalists, the strategies employed by the former to attract the latter, and the individual values of both groups.

Moreover, research using media logic theories tends to treat organisations as homogenous entities, interpreting data from INGOs' headquarters as indicative of the entire organisation's behaviour. However, as discussed in Chapter 3,[8] many INGOs have decentralised or federal systems of governance, allowing individual country offices significant autonomy in decision-making. This inevitably means that not all INGO national offices will act the same way or apply the same kind of media logic to their communications efforts. Even in cases where INGOs have centralised governance structures, final communication strategies are often simply the final result of internal debate and the individual choices of both leadership and operational staff members. Given that these individual choices and internal debates do not have predetermined outcomes, INGO communications research would benefit greatly from going beyond media logic theory-focused institutional decision-making.

One possible way to do this is to consider the effect of individual reflexivity. Archer (2007:4) has defined this as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa". Through interviewing over 170 people, Archer concludes that all humans employ four different modes of reflexivity as they go about their day-to-day work, with one of them being more dominant than the others

[8] See section 3.6.1.

in every individual. These modes are: communicative reflexives, autonomous reflexives, meta reflexives, and fractured reflexives. Each of these modes processes information differently, with a different objective in mind and therefore different action or reaction to social forces.

The communicative reflexives, for instance, tend to be "relatively truncated because they try out their thoughts with familiar interlocuters before they have formed them much, and rarely rely purely on their own judgement" (Sayer, 2009:116). On the other hand, autonomous reflexives engage in extensive internal conversation and tend to act on their ideas independent of others' input or consultation. Because they are independent-minded, they tend to avoid engaging in political movements or action, unless they align with their goals/objectives. Meta reflexives "are not satisfied with merely finding a way of circumventing constraints or getting opportunities but want to change those constraints and opportunities" (Sayer, 2009:118). As such, they tend to be actively involved in civil society action such as working with INGOs. With fractured reflexives, internal conversation seldom results in resolution of conflicting thoughts or a clear plan of action.

The relevance of Archer's work is twofold. First, it demonstrates that conceptualisations such as media logic and path dependency theories can provide some insight into why INGOs act the way they do. Individual agency and action based on specific (and differing) reflexive modes also contributes to how organisations behave. As she puts it, "the subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural and cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explaining social outcomes" (Archer, 2007:5). Individuals within INGOs can influence both policy and action, thereby affecting the extent to which the organisations' story production processes perpetuate or challenge Afro-pessimism, media logic notwithstanding.

Secondly, by recognising and studying individuals' agency, researchers are better able to contextualise media logic and the extent of its influence on INGO communication. In other words, media logic and mediatisation can play out in very different ways, in part due to the reflexive actions taken by individuals in an organisation. An INGO national (communications) office led by a communicative reflexive, for instance, would likely engage the media in ways that differ from those of a meta reflexive, with the former seeking to engage and integrate feedback from the media in the work they do while the latter contests and pushes back on them. By studying the thought and decision-making processes of individual INGO employees, this research will be able to not simply identify and define organisations' adoption of media logic, but also the individual agency involved in perpetuating or challenging it. This makes for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of INGO communication.

4.3.1 Tensions Between Operational Realities and INGO Normative Values

While INGOs in the past relied heavily on outsourcing professional help from freelance or retired journalists, film agencies and PR firms (Powers, 2015), two trends are now becoming increasingly common. First, these professionals are increasingly being hired as full-time staff members of INGOs (Council of Europe, 2015). As a result of this and the rapidly expanding roles they play in resource mobilisation and retention of legitimacy and relevance, INGOs are investing heavily in the professionalisation and establishment of whole communication departments (Powers, 2015; Franks, 2013; Ossewaarde et al., 2008). The second trend is that, beyond hiring communication professionals, INGOs are increasingly working in partnership with news media, the private sector and other promotional intermediaries in ways that are blurring the lines between journalism and development/advocacy work (Jacobs, 2016; Wright, 2015; Hulme and Edwards, 1997).

The rationale behind employing ex-journalists and public relations professionals is perhaps obvious, but worth noting nonetheless: it is expected that their professional contacts and relationships will make it easier for INGO-generated stories or story ideas to be picked up by news media and broadcast or printed for their vast audiences. This in turn increases the INGOs' chances to inform their target audiences of their work, advocate for specific action on the part of governments, fundraise for projects, or a combination of all three (Powers, 2014; Bristol and Donnelly, 2011).

Additionally, INGOs expect the communications professionals they hire to possess and exercise specific character traits and values that are neither technical skills/competencies nor material capabilities. Job advertisements for such positions often contain requirements that applicants be committed to certain ideals or passionate about helping others. In other words, INGO communication professionals are expected to perform "immaterial labour" – "labour that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, knowledge, or communication" (Hardt, 1999:94).

Because INGO communication workers are expected to combine their professional capabilities with a commitment to specific humanitarian ideals, the line between what is professional and what is personal is blurred, as is the relationship between INGOs and the news media they lobby. Most research into this increased interdependence has concluded that the INGO-media relationship has become complex and complicated, with some warning of "a kind of corrupt, symbiotic relationship between aid agencies and journalists" (John Naughton in Cooper, 2011:27). This corruption is as much to do with the compromise of journalistic principles like independence and fact-based stories as it is to do with outright influence peddling on the part of INGOs to earn favourable mention in published stories.

As pointed out earlier, INGOs also face similar challenges to their normative values as they prioritise the building of their organising and promotional capacities (Ossewaarde et al., 2008). Yet in spite of these threats to and tensions between normative values and organisational realities, the trend towards INGOs as newsmakers continues to grow. As international news media continue to reduce the number of foreign correspondents posted in Africa and other locations due to financial constraints, their dependence on location-based sources such as INGOs with their well-resourced communication departments and quality story production tools becomes even more established. As Wright (2018) notes, some researchers have even abandoned the attempt to distinguish between INGO-generated stories and mainstream media news, opting instead to talk of 'NGO Journalism' (McPherson, 2015; Zuckerman, 2010).

These interlinkages between the professional and personal as well as tensions between organising imperatives and normative values cannot be fully investigated and understood through the lenses of media logic, mediatisation or promotional culture. As discussed, these three theoretical frameworks do not adequately accommodate the impact of the individual agency both actively sought by INGOs when hiring communication professionals and employed by these workers when carrying out their duties.

The key takeaways from a review of this INGO communication research are thus threefold. First, media logic, mediatisation and promotional culture are popular theoretical frameworks through which researchers investigate INGOs. Given the technological advances made over the past three decades and the increasingly critical roles social and news media play in human interactivity, it is impossible to study INGO communication without duly incorporating these theories.

Secondly, all three theoretical approaches tend to put an emphasis on analysing organisational or institutional behaviour. This yields fascinating and important information about how and why INGO communication is conducted the way it is as well as the impact it has on INGOs' fidelity to their (respective) normative values. Ultimately, tensions that arise from the need to satisfy their financial and reputational considerations on the one hand and credible commitment to their normative values on the other.

However, these theoretical approaches tend to result in binary, boon-or-bane debates in regard to the influence of media logic, mediatisation and promotional culture on INGO communication. While such debates are helpful in identifying the advantages and disadvantages of current INGO communication trends, they do not adequately engage with the individual agency communications professionals have in shaping the INGOs' institutional/organisational behaviour both through their reflexivity and resultant action. As Malkki (2015:33) notes, "no one can feel all the suffering in the world with equal force". Given the competition among INGOs for limited resources and opportunities, INGO workers are constantly required to reprioritise their focus and be selective about which stories to emphasise at the expense of others. Furthermore, humanitarian action occurs within the context of "existing racial and other prejudices, and prevalent gender norms, all of which frequently have a bearing on how aid causes are presented and addressed" (Götz et al., 2020:16). Both the selectivity required of them and the context in which they work means that INGO communication professionals and the decisions they take as a result of their individual reflexivity have direct and considerable impact on the institutional/organisational choices INGOs make.

Since media logic, mediatisation and promotional culture largely focus on the institutional aspects of INGO communication, I propose the adoption of moral economy theory as a fourth lens through which to study the sub-sector. In the next section, I introduce the basic concepts of the theory, the various ways in which it has been applied to the study of international development and how its adoption in this research makes for a more holistic understanding of the persistence of Afro-pessimism within INGO communication.

4.4 Moral Economy Theory as a Framework for Researching INGO Communication

When Thompson (1971) first proposed the concept of moral economy theory, it was in reference to the ways in which different British social classes (re)negotiated their relationships based on their differing interpretations of normative values. At the time, the core assumption of the term was that economic activity is not merely transactional but relational (Carrier, 2018). It deals with the "ethical questions about justice, equity and future calculi that were not easily compressed into allocative efficiencies or calculable outcomes" (Adelman, 2020:191). Furthermore, moral economy concerns itself with the "production, circulation, appropriation and confrontation of values and affects" in relation to important social matters it investigates (Fassin, 2020:218).

Since then, it has been used by social scientists in various fields. Scott (1977), for instance, applied the concept to understand why and how peasants in Burma and Vietnam continued to engage in communal activities aimed at maintaining a minimum collective subsistence as opposed to maximising individual profit. His analysis moved away from the conceptualisation of the peasants' actions as either anti- or pro-colonialism/capitalism, instead focusing on the motives and rationales behind them. A similar approach was adopted by Smith (2011) in the study of peasant revolt in Russia. When applied to INGO communication, moral economy can be understood as "a network of economic exchanges founded in emotionally charged obligations to preserve others' ability to obtain subsistence" (Wright, 2018:73). Wright argues that moral economy theory not only "helps to protect scholars from selecting evidence to suit their own (normative) presumptions", it also enables them "interrogate exchanges between multiple actors, who are positioned in different organisations, locales and fields of activity, as well as actors who move between different positions or occupy several different forms of positions at the same time" (2018:81). Rather than conceptualise the INGO-media interaction as binary, this approach enables scholars to delve into what she speculates are "potentially mixed effects of NGOs' engagement in news making" (2018:82).

In the African context, moral economy theories have been used to provide a more nuanced theoretical framework within which to evaluate the complex relationship(s) between colonial and anti-colonial forces in Africa. Lonsdale (1992) used moral economy theory to help explain the rampant corruption and patronage in Kenyan politics, explaining that because ethnic identity within the country superseded national identity, patronage – while seemingly at odds with state-building – was actually a critical prerequisite to gaining and maintaining power. The political elite therefore had to engage in the redistribution of state revenue either to "further enrich already wealthy regions – perhaps to the benefit of the national product but at the risk of intolerable political strain; or subsidize economically weaker but fractionally importunate areas at the expense of investment" (Berman, 1998; Lonsdale, 1992:466).

Moral economy theory is particularly popular within African studies because it easily corresponds to post-colonial theory, by putting the focus on a nuanced understanding of processes, actions, reactions and their motives (Friberg and Götz, 2015). For instance, in analysing the lasting effects of colonialism on African societies, Mamdani (2018) is able to problematize concepts of citizenship and political engagement in modern African states as they relate to normative understandings of community, ethnicity and tribalism. Kimambo and Hyden (2008) also focus on analysing the ways in which various communities in Africa responded to and engaged with globalisation and its negative effects on their livelihoods.

Seeing the benefit of moral economy theory to understandings of development and aid, several in the past few years scholars have applied it to understanding the resource flow of aid and the resultant contestations or tensions (Friberg, 2015) as well as the ways in which beneficiary communities understand and respond to aid (Ivarsson, 2015).

Götz et al. (2020) – who as noted earlier highlight the conflicted positions humanitarian workers have to take within the context of competing priorities, racial and gender prejudices as well as limited resources and time – also propose the use of moral economy theory in research of the humanitarian sector. Rather than conceptualise humanitarian action based on the sector's ideal norms, they make a convincing case for thinking about humanitarian action based on its realities:

> Humanitarian agents constantly struggle with insufficient means, with the logistic difficulties of reaching those suffering most, and with vested public and private interests seeking to manipulate aid… Attempts to act under the banner of humanity and impartiality are therefore compromised by the concrete political and economic circumstances surrounding them… The political exploitation of aid, rather than being an anomaly, is its 'principal condition of existence': it necessitates agreements with which all players can live. (Götz et al., 2020:15-16)

They therefore define moral economy as the mechanisms which enable the supply of aid through a "process by which a relief agent adjusts a particular aid approach to the political and financial predicaments on the ground" in order to meet demand (Friberg and Götz, 2015:16). The relief agents this research is concerned with are INGO communication professionals, who continually have to compromise not only humanitarian and journalistic values at different points in time, but also personal preferences and values in order to achieve some success within the imperfect social, political and economic environments in which they operate.

A moral economy approach considers the moral values informing the economic arrangements and decisions taken by INGOs (Hesmondhalgh, 2017). The mechanisms that enable this are both institutional – including for instance the INGO governance structures discussed in section 3.6 – and personal, as is the case with decisions made as a result of reflexivity (Archer, 2007). Wright (2018) explores the interaction between INGOs and journalists in the production of news about Africa, evaluating the various "ways in which actors' mutual engagement in moral economies enabled them to respond to their obligations to others and to renegotiate the boundaries between fields" (Wright, 2018:80).

In examining a news article published in a British newspaper, *The Independent on Sunday*, she finds that the article was published as received from the Head of Media at Christian Aid and included pictures taken by a photojournalist-cum-INGO communications employee. However, this was not merely a result of media logic, mediatisation of INGO communications or the acceptance of promotional culture by Christian Aid or editors of *The Independent on Sunday*. Rather, it was a consequence of "actors' mutual agentive renegotiation of multiple value-laden obligations to others" (Wright, 2018:118)

The consequential elements of this interaction between the newspaper and Christian Aid are not simply down to institutional values or goals – although these are critical contributors to the interaction. Rather, it is the individual values, internal conversations engaged in by both the editors and aid workers and (re)negotiated stances taken that determine what each party views as agreeable. Instead of viewing this interaction as proof that "aid organizations are becoming increasingly ensnared in a global 'media logic'" (Cottle and Nolan, 2007:863), Wright applies moral economy theory to it, thus enabling the focus to go beyond the efficacy of such means and highlight the legitimating rationales that INGO communication professionals and journalists employ in such situations.

4.4.1 Between Churnalism and Mediatisation: INGO Communication Professionals as Intermediaries

Because of their intended purposes, INGO stories tend to be more promotional than journalistic in nature. By this I mean that they are conceptualised and produced to fit a predetermined narrative or enhance specific promotional goals and cannot be viewed purely as news stories in a journalistic sense. However, INGO communication is influenced greatly by journalistic values, resulting in stories that retain a journalistic format, adopt known news media values, and use its logic.

This adoption of both media values and promotional goals is an important distinctive feature of INGO communication, especially in an era when they are increasingly becoming major contributors to foreign/African news reports by Western media (Wright, 2017; Badawi, 2016; Jacobs, 2016; Franks, 2013). Recognising this interaction of promotional culture and mediatisation, scholars have questioned the impact it has on journalism and humanitarianism, largely viewing it as one of two extremes: either as a threat to the sector's normative values (Lugo-Ocando and Malaolu, 2015; Franks, 2013; Davies, 2011; Nolan and Cottle, 2009; Hume, 1997), or as an opportunity for journalism to be positively impacted by the strengths of INGO promotional activities such as advocacy (Vine, 2017; Van Leuven et al., 2013).

Davies (2011) coined the term 'churnalism' in pejorative reference to the uncritical reproduction of news material forwarded to journalists by PR practitioners. While he conceives this reversioned material as some sort of information subsidy, Jackson and Moloney (2016) argue that given the increasingly targeted and tailored "page-ready" nature of the information PR practitioners pass on to journalists, churnalism today is better understood as an editorial subsidy. This perspective is echoed by several INGO communications researchers such as Von Naso (2018), Powers (2018) and Orgad and Seu (2014b) who have demonstrated that INGOs are becoming extremely media savvy and adopting highly targeted methods of information sharing with the media in the hope of achieving their promotional or advocacy goals.

In the African context, there is significant debate about the payment of journalists by sources to produce news stories about the latter. A term has even been coined for it; brown envelope journalism(Skjerdal, 2018; Mwesige, 2010; Lodamo and Skjerdal, 2009). Although the practice is publicly decried by media practitioners as unethical and a form of bribery, it is widely practiced (Osei-Appiah, 2019; Skjerdal, 2018; Kasoma, 2009). Most journalists justify their acceptance of this money by pointing to the precariousness of their contracts: poor pay and no guarantee of refunds for expenses incurred in the course of getting a story (Skjerdal, 2010; Mwesige, 2004:90).

From a global perspective, Abbott (2009, 2015) made the argument that with the media's declining budgets for international news sourcing and INGOs' increasing capacity to produce quality news stories, this interaction should be viewed more as a constructive collaboration rather than an attack on journalism's core values. She makes several predictions about the future of this collaboration, noting that not only will the lines between journalism and INGO communication continue to be blurred, but "ultimately, those organisations, journalists and individuals – no matter what sector – that have proved their accuracy and transparency and earned the public trust will rise above the rest of the noise to become the new standard bearers of global information" (Abbott, 2015:192).

Beneath such predictions and analyses of INGOs' interactions with the media is the sense that INGO communications is now a highly specialised sector in which "the amateur volunteer impelled by a personal commitment to achieve social change has been displaced and replaced by the figure of the well-trained and disciplined professional" (Nolan and Mikami, 2013:66). INGO communication workers are therefore seen as having unique skillsets that enable them to bridge journalism and humanitarian work in a considered, professional manner that aids the achievement of humanitarian goals while also meeting ethical expectations. Success is therefore partially predicated on the communication professional's ability to leverage their "mode of reflexivity" (Archer, 2007) in the pursuit of the employing INGO's goals.

Even among INGO communication professionals, there is a dichotomy between those based in Western donor offices and those in operational or field offices in places like Africa because most analysis of INGO communications focuses on the final products (stories, photos and audio-visual communication) used by Western media and the tendency is to treat INGOs as homogenous entities and the material they publish in the West as emanating from or controlled by the Western offices. But as has been discussed in sections 2.7 and 3.7.2, INGO employees based in field offices play important roles in the story production process and there are often tensions or contestations between field country offices and donor country offices. These contestations occur on both personal and institutional levels, with the respective country office leaderships renegotiating everything from expected outcomes of programmes to operational time-frames and methods.

As far back as the early 1980s, World Vision has documented regular instances of contestation between African and Asian offices and their Western counterparts regarding how their partnerships should be constituted as well as the power and role of field offices in the global governance structures (McCollim, 2019; Bartlett and Curran, 2004; Whaites, 1999; Irvine, 1996). Similarly, Save the Children has, since its inception, undergone a series of highly contested reconfigurations and renegotiations of its global governance structure, with individual country offices insisting on retaining varying levels of autonomy in how they relate with field offices (Kloster, 2019; Lux and Bruno-van Vijfeijken, 2012). As has been noted:

> Even a large organisation can appear from outside to have a clear and homogenous character. Modern image-building has established the task of positively building up

> 'corporate identity' as one of the management's principal duties. Yet any organisation from the inside is, we all know, an arena for competing interests and points of view, sometimes for more or less better micro-political battles (Benthall, 1993:56)

INGO communications research would therefore benefit from the problematisation of the story production processes INGOs undertake not just in terms of how their communications professionals interact with the media to produce news stories but also with each other to source, produce and publish information about their operations in Africa to Western audiences. Most stories about INGOs' work in Africa – although published in the West – originate from workers in Africa. The roles played by African INGO workers in this production process can have far-reaching consequences.

An instance of this is discussed by Wright (2018) who studied an audio slideshow project published by the BBC but produced in collaboration with Save the Children UK and Save the Children in South Sudan. The story focuses on a former child soldier in South Sudan who is interviewed by a BBC reporter and a media producer employed by Save the Children UK. While the story was conceptualised and planned by the UK office, selection of the child soldier as well as the translation of the former child soldier's responses was handled by a South Sudanese field worker. Additionally, because of the way the project was (mis)handled, the field worker felt "he had inadvertently enabled an unjust exchange, which risked disrupting his harmonious, respectful relations with his kin" and he opted to leave the organisation shortly after (Wright, 2018:176).

The field worker therefore acted as an intermediary not only between the INGO and the BBC, but also between the ex-child soldier and the project's audience(s). His decision to leave the organisation (in part due to his strongly held views about the way the project was handled) also illustrates the significant amount of individual reflexivity employed by INGO communications professionals in their work. While both of these are critical aspects of the work, theories of media logic, mediatisation and promotional culture do not possess the analytical tools to engage with them. Moral economy theory on the other hand enables an analysis of "why conflicts between INGOs and news outlets occur as well as helping us to interrogate the tensions and arguments which occur within organisations" (Wright, 2018:180). Additionally, moral economy theory allows for a deeper understanding of how INGO communication professionals negotiate these tensions as well as the challenges presented by their (INGOs') social, political, economic and structural set-up. Specifically, it allows for a closer inspection of the rationales they employ when choosing what stories to tell, how to tell them, when, where and to whom. It helps explore "the conditions, forms and limits of processes of ethical reflexivity" (Nolan and Mikami, 2013:67). In as far as African, Africa-based INGO communication professionals are concerned, moral economy theory also enables an interrogation and understanding of the legitimating rationales behind their participation in the production stories and that (potentially) perpetuate Afro-pessimistic narratives.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter achieved four aims. First, I provide a theoretical understanding of media logic, mediatisation and promotional culture. Showing how these concepts have dominated the theoretical framework of INGO communication research, I identify the various advantages and contributions they have made towards understanding the sub-sector. Secondly, I explain their shortcomings. Briefly, these theories do not adequately appreciate the roles of individual agency and reflexivity in the INGO story production process; are mostly concerned with the institutional/organisational interactions between INGOs and journalism; and, as such, lend themselves to binary conceptualisations of the sub-sector as either threatening or expanding journalistic boundaries and norms. Thirdly, I introduce the theoretical concept of "modes of reflexivity" proposed by Archer (2007), demonstrating how they can be applied to INGO communications professionals' work logic. Lastly, I propose the adoption of moral economy theory as an effective way of redirecting INGO communications research from these binary conceptualisations to nuanced analysis of the interactions between INGOs, promotional intermediaries and journalists. Because of its focus on the ethical rationales behind these interactions, moral economy theory allows for critical engagement with the roles played by individual agency and reflexivity in shaping the ways in which INGOs communicate their work to audiences in the West. This is a particularly helpful capability when considering the roles African communications professionals play in the production of INGO stories that perpetuate, challenge or reappropriate Afro-pessimistic narratives. This chapter therefore establishes the theoretical tools used in my analysis chapters. In the next chapter, I lay out the methodology used for this research, justification for it and the ethical considerations made before, during and after data collection.

5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the various aspects of my research methodology, explain why the methods used were the best suited to meet its goals, and reflect on my positionality and its impact. I begin by reintroducing the research questions discussed in Chapter 1 before presenting the three main methodological approaches used in this research: participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis. After discussing the key features of each method, I highlight their advantages and show how they complement each other, enabling me to triangulate key observations of the research. In each case, I provide details of how each methodology was used in the collection of data from the field, some of the challenges faced and what I did to mitigate them. Next, I discuss my sampling strategy and rationales behind selecting the five INGOs involved in the study as well as the type of publications from which my textual analysis is derived. This then leads to a discussion of my data analysis strategy along with the ethical considerations made before, during and after the data collection process.

Lastly, I discuss my positionality, with particular reflection on the multiple positionalities I held while conducting the research, as an East African, researcher and communications professional who had worked with one of the five INGOs I was researching. While I acknowledge the challenges that come with my prior knowledge of and engagement in the sector, I argue that these (lived) experiences added nuance to my research.

5.2 Research Questions

This research is a direct response to multiple scholars' recognition of the lack of empirical evidence of Afro-pessimism in both the media and INGO communication (Wright, 2017;

Bunce, 2016; Nothias, 2016b; Scott, 2016, 2015). Using original data collected from five INGOs, this research seeks to understand the extent and nature of Afro-pessimism in INGO communication. Specifically, I seek to answer the following three research questions (hereafter referred to as RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3):

> **Research Question 1 (RQ1):** What are the organisational structures, processes and practices through which INGOs produce stories about their work in East Africa?
>
> **Research Question 2 (RQ2):** How do these organisational structures, processes and practices affect the distribution of power between INGO Communication staffers based in East Africa and the West?
>
> **Research Question 3 (RQ3):** To what extent and in what ways do the organisational structures, practices and workers' role perceptions reproduce Afro-pessimism in INGO communication?

The research questions are explored at both structural and individual level. At a structural level, I interrogate the ways in which the five organisations perpetuate or challenge as discussed in the introduction, I adopt participant observation as the primary research method, complemented by in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The data collected in the process of these two methods includes INGO communication literature on the participating organisations' websites or other communication platforms as well as their policy guidelines and annual reports. Having discussed the research questions and their attendant hypotheses, the next section introduces my research methods and why I chose them.

5.3 Participant Observation

INGO communication is conducted using several media: text, photography, video and audio (Lawrence and Tavernor, 2019; Ongenaert, 2019; Greenberg et al., 2011; Taylor, 2000). Participant observation has been described as "the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting" (Schensul et al., 1999:91). It is an ethnographic method of scholarship that enables a researcher to document and analyse internal operations of a subject through direct and sustained social contact (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Madison, 2005; Willis and Trondman, 2000). Researchers disagree on the required amount of contact and observing for the research to be considered ethnographic, with some insisting on extended periods that stretch into years while others put more emphasis on understanding the subject, regardless of the time it takes (Brennen, 2017). In either case, participant observation is acknowledged as an especially powerful tool in media and communication ethnography because it concerns itself with understanding production processes, structures and politics (Paterson and Zoellner, 2010; Cottle, 2007; Schensul et al., 1999) as well as addressing issues of unfairness or injustice (Madison, 2005; Wolcott, 1999).

Key to understanding and theorising INGO story production processes is knowing the reasons communication professionals employed in the sector make the decisions they do in regard to what stories to tell, how to tell them, and when to tell them. While attempts can be made to obtain this information through quantitative research or even structured interviews, it is always likely that interviewees will tell researchers the official line or what they think the researcher wants to hear rather than what actually takes place (Fine, 2003; King et al., 1994).

Also, because interviewees are talking about something they do regularly, they are prone to being oblivious to certain information which may be crucial to the research, but mundane and too ordinary for the interviewee to take note of (Kawulich, 2005). Issues such as the relationship a Uganda-based Communications Officer has with their UK-based manager, informal communication within the organisation, as well as the way support offices communicate with the field offices might not strike interviewees as factors worth divulging or discussing in an interview because they do not directly relate to the official production processes. It is such factors that have made this process notoriously hard to research or theorise. Participant observation is particularly useful in identifying systemic practices and behaviours within a "culture-sharing group" (Creswell and Poth, 2018:90). It was therefore considered to be the best methodology to adopt in this research, as it seeks to understand practices among INGO communication workers.

5.3.1 Overcoming Challenges of Participant Observation

This is not to say the method has no challenges. As has been noted by several researchers who used participant observation as a key data collection method, gaining access to the subject of research is one of ethnography's greatest challenges (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011; Boje, 2001; Schensul et al., 1999). Available evidence shows that many organisations are hesitant to give researchers unfettered access to their internal operations and production processes (Paterson and Zoellner, 2010; Crewe and Harrison, 2002; Wolcott, 1999). One of the biggest reasons for this hesitance is that organisations are unwilling or unable to invest in the time and resources that they think would be required to enable the researchers to effectively engage with and understand the inner workings of the organisation (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

This is especially true for INGOs, given that they are engaged with constantly changing and emerging humanitarian crises that often require more human resources than are available. A decision to divert the available and often insufficient manpower to assist an external researcher in a project whose results they have limited control over therefore becomes an extremely hard ask.

One way of mitigating this challenge is having professional experience in the sector (Paterson and Zoellner, 2010:100). Because most organisations are not fully trusting of researchers or their intentions, they are significantly more likely to grant researchers access based on a strong non-academic portfolio or practitioners' recommendations. McNeill and St Clair (2011), for instance, found that their professional positions as researchers with the Norwegian government enabled them to conduct ethnographic work with the World Bank in ways they would otherwise not have been able to.

In my case, experience as a communications worker with one of the INGOs was key to being granted access in two ways. First, I was able to introduce myself to the organisations not only as a researcher, but also as a former communications employee within the sector. Once granted access, my previous experience also helped establish a level of trust among the interviewees that would have otherwise been absent.

Secondly, because of this previous experience within the sector, many of the organisations I approached were satisfied that they would not need to deploy or invest extra resources into my presence in their offices or that I would not get in the way of them doing their work. My introductory email included a brief note about my experience within the East African region and a copy of my curriculum vitae.[9] The result was positive responses from three organisations in two countries (Uganda and Kenya). However, due to limited resources and time to visit the field, I settled for conducting participant observation in two of the three organisations, as the next section explains.

[9] See Appendix 1: Solicitation E-mail.

5.3.2 Observation Sites: Two Organisations, Two Countries

I spent a total of three weeks embedded in each of two INGOs' communications offices with one-week breaks in between (for a total of two months). The INGOs in question were World Vision Uganda and Plan International Kenya. During this time, I was allowed on field trips with the organisations and observed first-hand the collection of basic information from beneficiary communities that was to be used in generating stories. I also sat in departmental meetings in which tasks were allocated to individuals and assignments were discussed. Some of the observations I made during this period were discussed further with the participants to gain a better understanding of their perspectives or state of mind at the time. In all instances, field notes were taken. The table below details the work I did during the participant observation periods:

Organisation	Activities participated in
Plan International	1. Joined in three departmental meetings discussing work schedule, tasks to be completed and delegation of duty. I contributed suggestions about how to collect certain stories and, in one meeting, offered to take notes. 2. Joined staff members on field trips to Kwale and Kilifi to collect case studies and interviews. I helped in taking some of the photographs and offered suggestions about possible story angles.
World Vision	1. Sat in four departmental meetings discussing work schedules, tasks to be completed and delegation of duty. Helped take minutes in two of these and contributed to the planning of one field trip. 2. Attended an event to mark the official handover of a renovated health centre and medical equipment for its maternity ward. I helped prepare the press files for this event as well as take photographs.

Table 1: Participant Observation Activity List

Participating in these organisations' communication department activities was extremely insightful as it allowed me to see them in action and provide context to the responses they gave during interview sessions. In some cases, it also allowed me to identify inconsistencies or conflicts between the organisations' officially stated goals and their actions. Both contextual observations and identifying of inconsistencies would have been impossible through textual analysis and/or structured interviews alone.

Because of the limitations of time and finances, it was not possible to conduct participant observation in all five INGOs within the four-month period of field research. I therefore complemented the data collected through participant observation of two INGOs with in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as the next section explains.

5.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Unlike structured interview instruments like questionnaires and surveys, which are geared towards collecting "observable facts" (Brennen, 2017:29), semi-structured interviews seek to establish the meaning and context of actions observed by the interviewer or stated by the interviewee. Semi-structured interviews are sequenced with guiding questions that provide a starting point and general key issues to be discussed, but "generate free-ranging conversations about research topics that are directed by what participants have to say" (Roulston and Choi, 2018:233). While semi-structured interviews are often a research tool used in participant-observation (Spradley, 2016; Musante, 2010; Dewalt and Dewalt, 1998) they are also recognised as a primary research method that can be used independent of participant observation (Roulston and Choi, 2018).

This research uses semi-structured interviews as both a tool in participant observation and as a primary research method. In the former, I interviewed staff members from the two INGOs where I conducted participant observation – World Vision in Uganda and Plan International in Kenya. However, I also conducted a series of interviews with communications and management staff members of three other INGOs: Save the Children, Action Aid, and Christian Aid. The table below provides a breakdown of the semi-structured interviews conducted.

Organisation	Number of Interviews	Interview Period	During Participant Observation?	Number of Communications Workers interviewed	Number of Non-Communications Managers interviewed
Action Aid	4	June/July 2018	No	1	3
Christian Aid	2	May 2018	No	1	1
Plan International	5	May/June 2018	Yes	4	1
Save the Children	5	June/July 2018	No	4	1
World Vision	6	April/May 2018	Yes	5	1
Independent Communications Professionals formerly employed by two of the organisations researched	3	April, June and July 2018	No	3	0
Total	25			18	7

Table 2: Details of semi-structured interviews conducted

A total of 25 individuals who worked with these organisations in Uganda and Kenya were interviewed. All but one were citizens of the countries in which they worked, with the lone exception being a Ugandan working at the regional office based in Kenya.

5.4.1 Advantages of Semi-structured Interviews in Ethnographic Research

Semi-structured interviewing was used as the second research method owing to how well it lends itself to the issues being investigated in this research. As has been pointed out, the purpose of this data collection method “is to gather information from key informants who have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs related to the topic of interest” (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019:1). Given that the research primarily seeks to understand the roles played by Africans in the perpetuation and challenge of Afro-pessimism within INGO Communication, this method allowed for an open-ended exploration of interviewees’ experiences and perspectives on the story production processes their organisations employed. Examples of the key themes explored and the guiding questions asked during data collection are included in Appendix V.

Furthermore, because of their flexibility, semi-structured interviews allowed me to pursue unanticipated lines of inquiry as well as to be responsive to non-verbal cues such as intonation, gestures and body language (Opdenakker, 2006). This was particularly helpful when discussing questions like what interviewees felt needed to change in NGO communication or whether support offices edited stories sent to them by field offices in ways that they (field offices) felt distorted the original concepts.[10]

During participant observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted either before or after activities such as story-gathering or event management had taken place. In so doing, I was able to observe interviewees at work without interrupting them and to also refer back to these activities during the interviews. This provided opportunities for detailed discussion of the (interviewees’) logic, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes in these particular situations.

In most cases, these interviews were conducted in intervals of 30-60 minutes over the four months of my time in the field with follow-up questions and observations being made days or even weeks after the initial interviews. This further allowed me to explore emerging themes from my participant observation with interviewees working in other organisations, thereby

[10] See Appendix V guiding questions under ‘Communication Process’ for detailed examples of questions asked.

enabling me to triangulate my research findings using observation notes, semi-structured interviews and textual analysis as discussed in the next section.

5.5 Textual Analysis for Triangulation of Data

Triangulation is defined by Flick (2018:529) as a research process by which the object of inquiry is approached "from (at least) two points or perspectives". Within the context of ethnography, it is often used as a way to mitigate such challenges as confirmation bias (Turner and Turner, 2009), ensuring that the researcher's observations are not merely mirroring preconceptions about the subject.

For this research, I used textual analysis of samples of INGO publications such as annual reports, website information and policy positions to make sense of the primary data I was receiving from my observation notes and interviews.

Textual analysis, particularly as it relates to ethnography, is concerned with the way people in a particular context interpret or create meaning from the world around them (Smith, 2017; Roberts, 2000). I therefore used these publications not simply as a primary data source but as a secondary sources to explain, interpret and critique the responses given and observations made during my time in the INGO offices.

5.6 Sampling Strategy

5.6.1 Organisational Sampling Strategy

INGOs vary vastly in terms of size, footprint, organisational structure and communication strategies (Yanacopulos, 2015a; Ossewaarde et al., 2008; Carapico, 2000; Madon, 1999). In order to obtain data from a wide array of INGOs that would fit the research objectives, I set three parameters for the first phase of sample selection. With the exception of Rwanda and Burundi, which were colonised by Belgium and Germany respectively, four of the six East African countries were colonised by the British. Given this research's focus on Afro-pessimism and adoption of postcolonial theory, the first criteria used to select the INGOs considered the UK's historical links to the region. Therefore, to be included in the research, the INGO had to have either been founded in the UK or had its headquarters in the UK. This however did not reduce the sample size to one I could practically engage with as it resulted in hundreds of NGOs that could be included in this category.

The second selection criteria was that the INGO had to have a presence in East Africa, with national offices in at least two countries in the region, one of which had to be either Kenya or Uganda. The reasons for selecting these two East African countries were largely twofold: Kenya, with the most politically stable and largest economy in East Africa, also hosts the largest number of INGO regional headquarters. It therefore made for a rich data collection site. Uganda, on the other hand, has historically hosted the greatest number of refugees in the region while also experiencing a significant number of humanitarian crises (Rockenbach, 2016). From rebellions that lasted over 20 years to landslides, pandemics, extreme poverty and refugee crises, Uganda has been at the centre of international development attention for a very long time. This meant that many of the INGOs I sought to research would likely have worked there.

Thirdly, INGOs selected had to be involved in a wide range of public communication and fundraising initiatives including child or community sponsorship packages and humanitarian appeals. This criteria was added to ensure that any INGO selected had robust communication departments both in their field offices and in their fundraising offices in the West, as well as being engaged in both humanitarian emergency and long-term development projects. As such, the INGOs picked were involved in comprehensive forms of INGO communication and their work was not merely about humanitarian emergencies (which by their very nature tend to be sources of negative news).

Using these three criteria, a total of ten INGOs were approached through email, telephone and Skype to request access to conduct participant observation as the preferred method of data collection and in-depth interviews as a second option. As mentioned earlier, my previous experience as an INGO communications worker was highlighted as a strength that demonstrated to the INGOs that I had the specialist knowledge required to quickly be integrated in the communications departments without much effort on their part (Paterson and Zoellner, 2010). In all my initial requests, I offered to work for a maximum of 10 hours a week to support the INGOs' communication departments during my time if this was deemed to be a need.

Because of the semi-autonomy of field offices from their global headquarters, I initially sent these requests to the INGO field offices in Kenya and Uganda. Of the ten INGOs approached, six responded advising that I should first get clearance from their offices in the UK given that I was a UK-based researcher. Two declined my request, while one initially agreed to hosting me in both their Uganda and Kenya offices before later denying me access. Their reason for the change of heart was due to a "reduction in capacity" to host me (Email correspondence, 2018). One organisation did not respond to my emails at all, and repeated phone calls to them seeking audience with the country director or Communications Manager were unsuccessful. In total, six organisations expressed willingness to participate in the research: Action Aid, Christian Aid, Plan International, Practical Action, Save the Children, and World Vision. However, when it came to scheduling my time in the field, I was unable to get confirmation from Practical Action's Kenya office during the time I was in the country. Eventually the research focused on the five remaining organisations.

Because of the limited amount of time in the field (April-July), it was impractical to attempt to conduct participant observation in all five organisations' field offices in Kenya and Uganda. The following schedule was therefore adopted.

INGO	Participant Observation	In-depth Interviews
Action Aid Kenya	No	Yes (April-July)
Action Aid Uganda	No	Yes (April-July)
Christian Aid Kenya	No	Yes (April-July)
Plan International Kenya	Yes (May 2018)	Yes (April-July)
Plan International Uganda	No	Yes (April-July)
Save the Children Kenya	No	Yes (April-July)
Save the Children Uganda	No	Yes (April-July)
World Vision Kenya	No	Yes (April-July)
World Vision Uganda	Yes (June 2018)	Yes (April-July)
Regional office staff	No	Yes (April-July)
INGO Communication consultants	No	Yes (April-July)

Table 3: Participant Observation and Interview Schedule

5.6.2 Text Sampling and Selection Strategy

Beyond conducting semi-structured interviews with interviewees in the selected INGOs, I also collected and analysed their communication products. These included annual reports, brochures and published stories or photos. To have data that was comparable, three criteria were used to include or exclude such products.

First, the products collected had to have been produced within the period that the interviewees were employed at these organisations. This was done to ensure that interviewees had intimate knowledge of these products either as the originators or as active participants in the processes and activities that led to the material being produced. As this research partly seeks to explore the legitimating rationales employed by INGO communication professionals, intimate knowledge of and/or involvement in the development of these products was essential.

Secondly, I included in my analysis texts or products that were referred to by the interviewees during the semi-structured interviews or participant observation processes. This often happened as interviewees were explaining why they felt or acted in particular ways during their organisations' story production processes.

Lastly, texts were included in the data if they were produced by the selected organisations during the period that this research was conducted (2016-2020) and related to themes or examples discussed by interviewees during the interview processes. These were independently sought out upon reflection and analysis of interviewees' answers to questions posed to them. Information from the INGOs' websites was mainly from the sections pages describing the organisation as well as their stories, news or blog pages. The combination of texts directly referred to by interviewees and those independently sourced upon analysis of their responses provided yet another opportunity for triangulation of my data, thereby strengthening the credibility of my observations beyond the subjective recollections or opinions of the interviewees.

5. Data Analysis Strategy

All my in-depth interviews with the INGOs were recorded using a digital voice recorder. The recordings were then transferred to an encrypted cloud storage system provided by the university and deleted from the voice recorder. During my participant observation with the two organisations, I also took field notes on my laptop as well as in a notebook. These notes were also transferred to the university's encrypted cloud storage. On completion of my data collection, I transcribed all the interviews, clearly labelling the sources and dates.

I then saved copies of the interview transcripts, anonymising each interview in two ways. First, the designation of each staff member was generalised into their occupation as opposed to their job titles. Thus, interviews were categorised as Communications Staffer, Human Resources Staffer, etc. I retained the organisation name in order to be able to track institutional or thematic peculiarities but replaced the names of the staffer with numbers from 1-25. The numbers were ascribed to each interview based on the alphabetical order of the third letter in each of the interviewees' surnames. I then saved the anonymised transcripts in NVivo along with the publications and webpages identified as relevant for my textual analysis.

The next step was to analyse my data, identifying patterns and links related to my research questions. The principle of my approach was to allow the data to dictate the themes rather than predetermine what themes I was looking for. I did this by establishing five general thematic areas or nodes and categorised information in the data along them. These were general enough not to prejudge the data, but specific enough to be a useful starting point of identifying themes relevant to the research. They included the following:

a. The editorial hierarchy or explanations/information relating to the story production processes organisations had in place.
b. Instances of local agency in both the story production process and interviewees' observations.
c. Examples of Afro-pessimism given/identified by the interviewees, in my field notes or in the INGO communication materials/publications collected.
d. Justifications and/or explanations for the Afro-pessimistic narratives.
e. Explanations of how communications material generated locally is used.

As I analysed the data, however, several other themes and sub-themes emerged that required new thematic areas. Allowing the anonymised data to dictate which themes and sub-themes I created provided me with yet another check to any confirmation bias I might have had as a former INGO communications worker with lived experiences in the region. In some cases, interviewees' responses or sections in the publications analysed fit into more than one thematic area. These patterns were captured by NVivo, enabling me to link a single response to several issues or themes.

While this strategy was effective in identifying patterns and themes in the data, there was a limit to how much I could anonymise the interviewees, which raised some ethical challenges, as discussed in the next section.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

Prior to my travel to collect my data, the university conducted a review of my project's ethical considerations. Application form number PVAR 17-061 was submitted to the university in December 2017 and duly approved in February 2018, eight weeks before I travelled to the field. Included in the application was a risk assessment form for the two collection sites I was planning to visit (Uganda and Kenya) as well as a copy of the consent form I was to use for my data collection.

Although non-anonymity was the default position of the research, anonymity was included as an option. This was mainly because most of my interviewees were spokespersons or senior employees of the INGOs with authorisation to speak on behalf of the organisation. As this default position differed from most academic research, I highlighted the non-anonymity at the start and end of my interviews in order to maintain clarity on how the data I was collecting was going to be used. Beyond the standard university approval procedures however, there were two other ethical considerations I had to engage with during my data collection and analysis: the privileged information I had as a result of prior work with one of the organisations as well as the anonymisation processes during my analysis. I discuss each of these considerations below.

5.8.1 Potential Conflict of Interest

The first ethical consideration concerned my previous work with one of the INGOs involved in the research and my capacity to collect and interpret data from it without being unduly biased. Between 2008 and 2013, I worked as a communications staffer for two INGOs: World Vision and Compassion International. During this time, I was responsible for conceptualising, writing and editing impact stories of the organisations' programmes in Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Mali. For a year, I was a member of World Vision's Regional Disaster Management Team (RDMT). The RDMT is a specially trained group of staff members from all sectors of the organisation's workforce that is depended upon to deploy on site within 48 hours of a humanitarian emergency occurring anywhere on the continent. This experience was useful when trying to gain access to the researched organisations.

Ethically, however, I had to consider how this previous contact affected my data collection and analysis. Like McNeill and St Clair (2011), I had to consider whether I was abusing my position as an insider. For instance, knowledge of the organisation's communication protocols and national strategy meant that I was privy to information that was not publicly available. Whether to use such information and how to use it without breaking prior employment confidentiality or compromising the validity of the research were questions I had to constantly confront. One of the ways I circumvented this ethical problem was to include any previously known information in my interviews with interviewees. By asking them about certain policies or information that was not publicly available but which I was privy to during my years of employment there, I allowed the interviewees to offer their perspectives on it. This also enabled me to triangulate my observations and conclusions, ensuring that my interpretation of the data was not based solely on my prior professional interaction with the organisation.

The other way of dealing with this ethical issue was to include another organisation in my participant observation. By adding Plan International to the organisations in which I was embedded, I expanded my sample size, ensuring that any information that I collected from my time with World Vision was interpreted and analysed within a larger context of other organisations.

5.8.2 Interviewees' Anonymity

The other ethical consideration I had related to the anonymity of the interviewees. All my interviewees signed a consent form in which they indicated whether or not they wanted to be interviewed and if they wanted to be anonymised in the final research output. With the exception of one interviewee, all indicated that they were fine with not being anonymised and having the information they shared directly credited to them.

However, the academic norm in data collection is that the researcher anonymises interviewees and, where possible, protects them from being identified (Clark, 2020; Walford, 2005). This duty was particularly heightened by my use of participant observation, which gave me access to both personal and institutional decision-making processes or views that contradicted the official positions of the individuals or organisations. While these kinds of contradictions were an important part of my research output, they potentially put interviewees at risk of being victimised or reprimanded and this was an ethical responsibility I had to bear regardless of whether or not the interviewees had signed away their anonymity.

I dealt with this situation in two main ways. First, beyond having the interviewees sign the consent form, I requested that they allow me to contact them in future when completing my analysis to ensure that they were okay with being on the record as having said certain things. This meant that I potentially risked having very insightful parts of my research cut out or becoming less clear and impactful due to the need for anonymity. But with the alternative being potentially putting some of my interviewees' careers on the line, this seemed like the correct ethical choice.

Secondly, I adopted an extra layer of identifiers for my data over and above those used in my general data analysis strategy. This included identifying interviewees in more general terms such as 'INGO Communications Staffer' as opposed to mentioning the specific organisation with which the interviewee worked. Alternatively, I mentioned the organisation that the interviewee worked for, without mentioning the country office or designated title.

Sometimes, because the information given by the interviewee was very specific to an organisation's national office and the research benefited from this specificity, the name of the country office is mentioned. Also, the information shared was sometimes already in the public domain, was the official position/policy of the organisation or was being provided by a senior staff member who was ordinarily officially authorised to speak publicly on behalf of the organisation. In each of these cases, more identifiers – ranging from their full name to their official titles – were added to the interviewee's quotes when used in the research.

This fluid identification of interviewees enabled me to strike the balance between my research's need for attribution in specific instances of organisational contradiction or significant revelations, with my duty to protect the identity of my interviewees. This approach, however, did not extend to national directors, Communications Managers or other senior staff members who were authorised to speak on behalf of the organisation in the day-to-day execution of their jobs. Also, in a few cases where being specific strengthened my research analysis or where I did not anticipate any threats posed to interviewees as a result of attributing quotes to them – and where consent had been provided – I revealed the interviewee's identity.

Although making these determinations and ethical considerations – such as whether or not interviewees should be identified – first appeared straightforward, I was also aware of the impact my previous experience in the sector, my lived experience in the region and my position as a researcher had not just on the people I interviewed and observed, but on my own conclusions. This consideration is known as positionality and the next section discusses it further.

5.9 Considering My Positionality

Positionality is "the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study – the community, the organisation or the participant group" (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014:628). The stance a researcher assumes affects not only the power dynamics between them and the interviewees but also the results obtained (Brewer, 2000).

In regard to this research, my experience as a communications worker with one of the INGOs was key to being granted access in two ways. First, I was able to introduce myself to the organisations not only as a researcher, but also as a former communications employee with one of the INGOs. Once granted access, my previous experience also helped establish a level of trust among the interviewees that would have otherwise been absent. Also, because there was a considerable amount of time that had lapsed between the time I worked with one of the INGOs and the time I conducted the research (six years), the potential of my professional connection to the organisation influencing the interviewees was low. Not only had all my former colleagues moved on to more senior positions in other organisations, but both of my former supervisors were also in transition to other jobs. This meant that although my relationship with them was a factor in gaining access, my interaction with the communications team was minimally affected by previous relationships.

5.9.1 Multiple Positionalities: Challenges and Opportunities

During my research, my positionality was multi-faceted. I was a Ugandan (East African), a researcher, a researcher from a British university, a former colleague, and a former subordinate. Each of these positions came with power dynamics that had the potential to affect the research and its findings.

With the exception of one of the organisations, all the others had previously hosted researchers from Western universities. Therefore, while the potential for this aspect of my profile to affect the research was not absent, it was minimal owing to the organisations' experience with researchers from Western universities. Moreover, the communications departments of all the INGOs regularly received donors, celebrities and staffers from their Western offices. As an East African researcher – albeit one at a university in the UK – my presence and profile was not significantly different from those they were used to hosting.

In the case of the in-depth interviews, they were all held either at the interviewees' place of work or, in cases where this was not feasible, places suggested and chosen by them. This was done to ensure that interviewees were in familiar environments and not unduly burdened or influenced by my preferred choices. On three such occasions, the interviewees elected to have the interviews conducted at malls they usually went to when working away from the office. One of the interviewees chose to meet at a church they attended while another – due to the time the interview was scheduled – preferred to meet at the regional offices of the organisation (they were national office staffers).

While several of the potentially disruptive power relations were mitigated, as discussed above, it still remained the case that in some instances, my (perceived) seniority as a former Communications Manager and now postgraduate researcher may have impacted on my interactions with some of the interviewees, particularly those in junior positions within the INGOs' communication departments. Even though I aimed to interact with them as I did the senior employees, it is conceivable that my regular interaction with and relationships with the senior employees, including the national and regional directors, meant that they perceived me to be in an elevated position and occasionally treated me as they would their supervisors. This was particularly the case in the initial weeks of my participant observation with one of the organisations as we went to the field to collect information for impact stories. One of the measures taken to counter this position of power at the beginning of my research was to always interact with the junior employees in group settings where their sensitivity to such dynamics was de-amplified. After a few weeks of interaction, I was able to form relationships with them that were separate from my (perceived) seniority, thereby further limiting this potential challenge in my data collection.

In the instances of participant observation with Plan International Kenya, I was invited to travel with the communications team as they went into beneficiary communities to collect impact stories, photos and videos. My role as a researcher was known to the team and made known to the community members with whom we interacted.

Positionality also affected the focus of my interviews, observations and lines of inquiry while collecting data. As noted in the introduction, 2018 was a particularly tumultuous period for the development sector with a global spotlight shone on not just the sexual misconduct of senior leaders of Oxfam and Save the Children, but on the power and gender imbalances between aid workers and the communities they serve. Of the organisations included in this research, Save the Children was affected most, losing not only the trust and support of governments, major supporters and individual donors, but also over £100m in revenue (Kay, 2019). As a researcher and former international development worker resident in the UK, I was keenly aware of these developments and approached my time in the field with them in mind.

However, while the drop in income related to these scandals was registered in 2018 by Save the Children, the effect of this drop did not immediately impact the field offices in Uganda and Kenya as their operational budgets were passed in 2016/2017. Moreover, while these scandals generated a lot of bad press in the UK, no similar trend was registered in Uganda and Kenya. Most interviewees did not bring up these scandals in their interviews unless prompted and, even then, provided no evidence of them affecting their operational budgets at time. As such, from the perspective of national offices, the time of reckoning that INGOs were facing in the West did not translate to the same at operational level, save for the projected economic impact on operations in the years following 2018. But because discussion of this would have been largely anticipatory at best, I did not make it a major component of my research.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed description of my research methodology. I discussed my research questions, noting my focus on the individual, locally-based East African employees of the five INGOs and their agency, or lack thereof, within the national, regional and global structures of the organisations they work for. My interest is not to simply demonstrate a presence or absence of Afro-pessimism within the INGO sector but to identify ways in which it is understood, perpetuated, challenged and/or appropriated to achieve personal or organisational goals. In other words, the research seeks to identify and analyse forms of extraversion within INGO communication – if any.

To achieve this, I have relied on three primary methods of data collection and analysis: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis. I argue that combining these three methods enables me to triangulate my findings, thus addressing many of the challenges that are often associated with ethnographic research.

Thereafter, I discussed my sampling strategy, explaining why I chose the five organisations included in the research as well which INGO texts and publications I included in my analysis, why and how. I specifically point out that because textual analysis is done primarily as a way of triangulating information derived from participant observation and interviews, it is limited in scope to the specific themes or issues raised within the context of the other two methods.

Relatedly, I discuss my data analysis strategy, showing how I made sense of the data I collected and anonymised the interviewees. I argue that adopting a data-led approach to establishing themes within the research was not only consistent with this research's ethnographic methods but also helpful in providing an extra layer of protection from confirmation bias. I further discussed the multiple levels of coding the transcribed interviews in order to allow for in-depth analysis of the data while also maintaining high levels of anonymity. This is particularly key given the close-knit nature of the international development sector and how relatively easy it can be for interviewees to be identified. This is also linked to my two main ethical considerations: the potential conflict of interest given my past professional experience as an INGO worker and my written commitment to anonymise interviewees.

I concluded the chapter with a reflection on the impact of positionality on my research, showing how the multi-faceted layers of positional power I possessed as well as the potential of unintended bias were overcome in the collection and analysis of my data. These included my position as a researcher with previous experience in the subsector I was researching, my relationships with and profile as a senior communications specialist, my standing as a researcher with a Western university, and my nationality as a Ugandan/East African.

Having discussed my research methodology, I now turn to the first results chapter of my thesis.

6 The Politics and Hierarchies of INGO Communication

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the political economy of INGO communication in three ways. First, I discuss the organisational structure of these institutions, showing which African countries each of the five INGOs operates in and where their respective regional offices are based. I also briefly discuss the politics involved in setting up regional offices in a particular country. This chapter establishes that although INGOs seem to be in the process of devolving power to locally-based workers, national office communications departments are still largely viewed as primarily support functions to programme implementation.

Next, I identify two global governance structures followed by these organisations: a centralised, top-down system in which the Western support offices maintain legal and operational control of the Global South offices, and a decentralised, federal system that empowers both Western and Southern offices to work in a more equitable partnership. I argue that although INGOs appear to uphold participatory methodologies as seen in their rhetoric, policy and governance statements, in practice, local agency is exercised through personal initiatives and informal intra-organisational relationships, rather than formal governance and accountability structures.

Lastly, I analyse the different ways in which locally-based communications staff members engage with and respond to support office requests and demands. Based on the data from interviews and observations during field visits, I conclude that internal negotiations and compromises about stories are commonplace, and local staffers report having more agenda-setting influence (about what to cover) than influence over narrative framing (how to cover it). This finding is consistent with emerging literature which shows that locally-based African INGO workers are important contributors to the continent's media image, but their agency within the sector is constrained and limited by existing institutional structures and communication strategies (Roberts and van Houten, 2021; Wright, 2017). As a result, even those most aware of and resistant to Afro-pessimistic narratives in INGO communication find themselves having to employ extraversion strategies as defined by Peiffer and Englebert (2012) and discussed in Chapter 2.

6.2 Who is Who: Mapping the INGO Communication Hierarchy

INGOs have regional offices for the purposes of coordinating a cluster of national offices. Typically, these clusters follow geographical proximity. For instance, many INGOs with national offices in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi may have an East African regional office, while national offices in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia may be coordinated by a Southern African regional office.

Often, the logic employed in determining which countries make up a 'region' – an administrative label given to a set of INGO national offices – is based on geographical location. Thus, countries found in East Africa form a regional cluster, as do those in West, South and North Africa. In other cases, national offices that are in geographically different areas are clustered into one region. Save the Children and Plan International, for instance, have a West and Central Africa regional office, combining countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo – which is both geographically and politically more connected to its East African neighbours – with Nigeria and Niger in the Western part of the continent. Others like Action Aid envision entire continents as one region, thereby having one regional office to coordinate 19 national offices spread across East, West, Central, North and Southern Africa. The table below provides a breakdown of the African countries each of the five INGOs operate in as well as how their regional offices are structured.

INGO	No. African Field Offices	List of African Countries Operated in	No. African Regional Offices	Clustering	Country Hosting Regional Office
Action Aid	19	Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	1	Africa Region	Kenya, South Africa
Christian Aid	18	Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe	None ('regional' staff based in national offices)	None	
Plan International	25	Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	2[11]	Middle East, Eastern and Southern Africa West and Central Africa	Kenya Senegal
Save the Children	22	Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	3	Middle East and Eastern Europe East and Southern Africa West and Central Africa	Jordan Kenya Senegal
World Vision	26	Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	3	East Africa Office Southern Africa West Africa	Kenya South Africa Senegal

Table 4: The Five INGOs' Footprints in Africa

Because regional offices provide coordination and oversight to national offices, several considerations go into deciding which country hosts them, as a regional office worker at one of the INGOs explained:

> Hosting a regional office of an INGO is very prestigious and comes with several advantages to the host nation. For starters, regional offices tend to have very many expatriates. This alone has economic benefits given that they will need upscale accommodation, education facilities and other such infrastructure. Also, the international development community is

[11] Plan International further expands the two regions into five sub-regions (Southern Africa, North and East Africa, Sahel West Africa, Coastal West Africa, and Mano River Cluster).

> very closeknit. Convincing one INGO to have their regional offices in one country can easily translate into having other INGOs follow suit. (INGO Regional Office Staffer 2)

This knock-on effect may partly explain why all three INGOs with two or more regional offices have them in the same countries (Kenya, Senegal, and South Africa). Other INGOs not included in the study, including Oxfam, Care International, Child Fund and BRAC, have similar structures, with their regional offices based in these three countries. Similarly, intergovernmental organisations like the UN and its specialised agencies have regional offices in these countries.

Senegal, Kenya and South Africa also happen to be some of the most economically developed and politically stable countries in their respective regions. This is yet another incentive for the INGOs to have their regional offices there:

> [Situating regional offices in these countries] makes perfect sense. Remember the principal reason regional offices exist is to coordinate national offices. Therefore, it is important to have them located in places that are stable and convenient. Otherwise, there is no way you can have a regional office located in a country with no efficient infrastructure and expect that they will properly coordinate activities in the region. (INGO Regional Office Staffer 2)

While there is logic to this argument, it does bring into question the rationale behind the recent drive to have INGOs move their headquarters from the Global North to the Global South. Organisations like Action Aid and Oxfam insist that their moves to Johannesburg and Nairobi respectively are informed primarily by a desire to be closer to where they operate and empower the Global South as the primary custodians of the development project (Campolina, 2015; Moorhead and Clarke, 2015). And yet, by choosing to have their regional and global headquarters in the most developed economies on the continent, they are simply replicating in Africa the power dynamics and top-down structures that existed when they were headquartered in London, Washington and New York. If "empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (Narayan-Parker, 2005:5), then having the organisations' centres of power based in the richest and most powerful countries in Africa does little to empower INGOs' primary beneficiaries.

On the other hand, locating these regional offices in countries that have no infrastructure to facilitate the efficient coordination of the national offices can be counterproductive. It would require higher administrative and logistical costs, which in turn would contradict calls to make INGOs' expenditure more focused on the delivery of their programmes. In any case, as has previously been noted, equity and empowerment go beyond the location of INGO headquarters and are more about "addressing power in terms of decision-making and resource" (Williams, 2018:8). INGOs are therefore constantly having to balance the need to be seen as being located where they are working and the financial/logistical costs of doing so.

Apart from the selected locations of INGO regional offices and what they reveal about their logic, the naming of regional offices demonstrates that even here, INGOs adopt stereotypical and Afro-pessimistic assumptions. Christian Aid, Plan International and Save the Children have operations in Egypt. However, both Plan International and Save the Children categorise Egypt as part of the Middle East. An interviewee explained the rationale used by Save the Children regarding the matter:

> Of course, geographically, Egypt is in Africa. But politically, most people tend to think of it as part of the Middle East. Also, culturally, Egypt shares a lot more similarity with other countries like Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory than with, say, Nigeria or Senegal. So, since it is the only North African country we work in, it makes better sense from a managerial point of view to have it included in the Middle East region. (Save the Children Regional Staffer 2)

When asked who they meant by 'most people', the interviewee clarified that he was referring to audiences in the West, to whom the vast majority of INGO communication is aimed. His explanation reveals a combination of pragmatism and an uncritical acceptance of negative stereotypes that feed into Afro-pessimism. The cultural and even geographical proximity of Egypt to Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Palestine is indisputable. All these countries are majority Muslim states, members of the Arab League and have historical ties that go back centuries. Yet unlike terms like Central, Eastern, or Western Africa, the Middle East has long been shown to be an imprecise, politically loaded Western construct (Culcasi, 2010; Clayton, 2003) that at once orientalises the countries that constitute it (Said, 1978) while also removing a significant part of the continent from Western imaginations of Africa (Nothias, 2012). By categorising Egypt as part of their 'Middle East' region, INGOs like Save the Children (inadvertently or not) help perpetuate the racialised image of Africa as synonymous with black people. In this respect, INGOs appear to mimic rather than challenge media narratives, as has been argued by several scholars (Fenton, 2010; Nolan and Cottle, 2009) and discussed in section 2.5.

6.2.1 Top-Down Organisational Structures

Whereas most of the interviewees insisted that INGO regional offices are mostly for purposes of coordination rather than direct supervision of national offices, the job descriptions of regional office employees as well as their organisational reporting structures appear to indicate a more top-down relationship than was acknowledged. This section discusses the organisational structures of the three INGOs that had regional offices in three or more parts of the continent as well as their reporting structures.

6.2.1.1 Plan International

With national offices in 25 African countries, Plan International has two regional offices and five sub-regional offices. The Middle East, Eastern, and Central African regional offices are located in Nairobi, Kenya, within the same building as the Kenya national offices, but on a separate floor. With over 40 staff members, it coordinates the organisation's programming in 14 countries. An interviewee in the human resources department shared the following reporting structure, also available on the organisation's website:

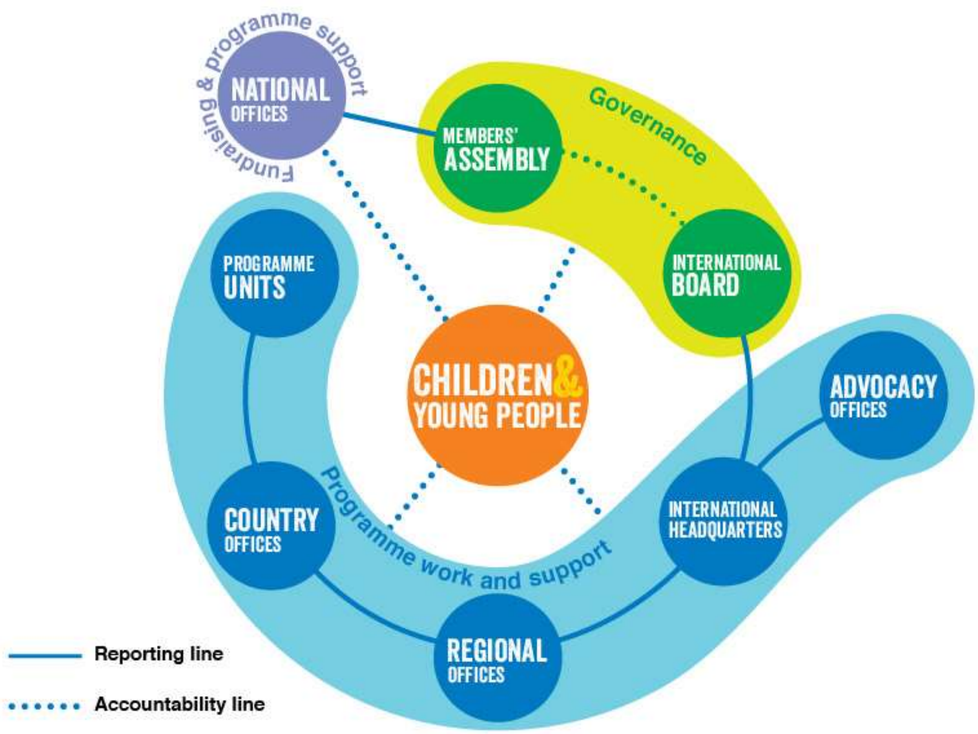


Figure 1: Governance and Management Structure of Plan International

Plan International refers to its support offices in the West, charged with raising funds for its programmes, as national offices or organisations, while those in which it carries out its programmes are called country offices.

One of the most striking aspects of their visualised organisational structure is the independence of their support offices. While the organisational chart shows an 'accountability line' that suggests some sense of responsibility that their support offices have to their beneficiaries, there is no legally binding document to operationalise it. As the organisation itself states, these support offices collectively constitute the highest decision-making body known as the Members' Assembly. The explanation on their website makes this clear:

> National Organisations play a key role in the governance of the organisation. National Organisations are also responsible for fundraising and perform a vital role in development education and advocacy in their jurisdictions. In addition, National Organisations work together with Plan International, Inc. to ensure the effective management and implementation of major grant-funded projects.
>
> National Organisations are accountable to their donors through their national regulators and directly through their individual feedback mechanisms. They appoint delegates to sit on the Members' Assembly, our highest decision-making authority.
>
> National Organisations are managed by their own National Director who is accountable to their individual governing bodies for their operations. (Plan International, 2020)

By putting the ultimate decision-making power in the hands of the offices raising money, Plan International establishes a pyramid line of command in which country offices implementing their programmes, such as those in East Africa, have very limited decision-making power. The structure also recognises the Western offices as the ones that 'perform a vital role of development education and advocacy'.

The field offices, on the other hand, are described almost exclusively as implementors of the organisation's programmes. On its website, the INGO describes the National Offices – largely based in the Global North – as "separate legal entities and have the same purpose and global strategy" (Plan International, 2020). On the other hand, there is no independence for the field offices and neither is their agency highlighted. Their legal dependence on the global headquarters and international board is explicitly mentioned:

> Our country offices, led by our Country Directors are responsible for all programme operations within their country. Most country offices are branch offices of Plan International, Inc. with no separate governance structure. They are line managed by the Regional Hubs. (Plan International, 2020)

What this organisational structure reveals is a lopsided, top-down governance style that limits Plan International's Southern offices to implementing whatever those in the Global North decide. As far as INGO communications is concerned, this also means that the primary role of

South-based communication workers is to cater to the needs of the independent national offices like Plan International UK. It also means that whatever agency these communications workers may have is only to the extent that they are satisfying the national offices' needs or expectations. This situation might stand accused of being neo-colonial in structure, where territories in the South had some form of local leadership, but the agenda and structure of government was dictated by the colonial power in charge. The colony and colonised were referred to as being part of the coloniser's empire but lacking both the agency to determine their local priorities as well as the benefits that citizens of the coloniser enjoyed. Likewise, countries like Uganda and Kenya are viewed as sites of operation for the organisation but are not afforded the structural and legal agency.

6.2.1.2 Save the Children

A similar set-up can be seen with Save the Children. The organisation's top governance body consists of 30 independent national entities along with the secretariat, Save the Children International, which is charged with overseeing the implementation of the INGO's programmes in the Global South (Save the Children UK, 2019). These national entities include a few non-Western countries such as Japan, India and South Korea as well as countries like Guatemala and Honduras, which although geographically located in North America, are developing countries. However, when it comes to Africa, only South Africa is listed as an independent national entity. The organisation's offices in places like Uganda and Kenya are described as "international programmes" with no seat at the decision-making table.

Interestingly, while South-based countries have no legal or structural autonomy, the organisation allows some of its Western entities, including Save the Children UK, to "design international programmes in conjunction with national donors, which are implemented by Save the Children International, as well as providing surge capacity to support the delivery of frontline programmes in emergency situations" (Save the Children UK, 2019:47).

This operational structure demonstrates the disconnect between the participatory tone adopted by INGOs when describing their work and the reality of its implementation. Many of the senior leadership members I interacted with in the five organisations acknowledged that this imbalance of power was a hinderance to living up to their organisations' ideals and needed to be urgently rectified. One interviewee questioned the extent to which the organisation they worked for can claim to be participatory in its approach to international development:

> If we say that, as an organisation, we are working in partnership with vulnerable and poor communities, and yet even at a national level, we do not have the power to make the kind of strategic decisions made by our colleagues in the UK or the US, how is that participatory? Is this an equal partnership or a dictatorship disguised as a partnership? Those are questions that we sometimes put to our colleagues in the West but then, of course, he who pays the piper calls the tune. So even when we complain, there's very little we can do unless our colleagues decide to act otherwise. (INGO Senior Leader 1)

Another interviewee who is a member of the senior leadership team of a national office pointed out the irony of an INGO claiming to be championing equality and equity on the one hand and yet having a very top-down organisational structure in which the resource-rich offices dictate the agenda:

> You go around collecting money from the public to fight inequality in Africa. And then, once you have the money, you come to Africa and say, 'Look, this is how we are going to tackle inequality'. And when your partner in Africa says, 'Can you and I have an equal say on how to use this money?' or suggests a different way to tackle the inequality, you can't listen. Instead, it is the donor, who gave you the money, that must be satisfied. And the methods of determining success are drawn up by you. Isn't that just adding another layer of inequality to what we are already experiencing? (INGO Senior Leader 2)

This interviewee's views, however, also included recognition that some level of accountability to the donors was required and therefore Western offices were duty bound to retain more power in the decision-making process. They concluded that the only way to break this cycle was for the South-based offices to start mobilising resources independent of those provided by their West-based offices.

> At the end of the day, we cannot hold out our hands begging and then again want to set the terms and conditions. There is an African proverb that [translates to mean] the person serving the food will always ensure that they get a fair portion of the meal. If you are not the one serving, you are not in control of what you will get. It's as simple as that. (INGO Senior Leader 2)

This perspective demonstrates the power that finances have on organisational behaviour. It also shows that South-based employees are aware of and uncomfortable with the imbalance of power that exists within INGOs, particularly because it contrasts starkly with their stated normative goals such as equity, equality and justice. Specifically, the perspectives of these senior INGO leaders suggest that INGOs' organisational structures consist of top-down relationships between the Global South and North.[12] This hierarchy is largely based on financial power, with offices that raise money for programming sitting at the decision-making table while those implementing the programmes are limited to implementing the decisions made.

However, while all five INGOs have in the past had such top-down structures, some of them have made changes towards having a more horizontal relationship between support offices and their field office counterparts. The next section discusses World Vision's increasingly decentralised organisational structures and their effects.

[12] Whereas two leaders' perspectives cannot be empirically held up as representative of the entire sector, they did resonate enough with many of the interviewees and my own professional experience to warrant using them as specific examples of a generally held view.

6.2.2 World Vision's Move Towards Decentralised Development

In terms of both footprint and financial resources, World Vision is one of the largest INGOs in the world (Yanacopulos, 2019). It is also one of the most decentralised, with a very fluid, federated organisational structure. Operating in 90 countries, the INGO is structured such that each of these countries have boards or governing councils that serve as the highest decision-making organs for their national offices. Differing from Save the Children and Plan International, World Vision recognises each of their national offices as equal members of what they refer to as a 'Partnership' (World Vision International, 2019). These national office boards or governing councils select one member to represent them on regional boards, which in turn nominate one representative to sit on the World Vision International board.

> World Vision International is the registered legal entity which, through its council and board of directors, provides the formal international structure for the governance of the Partnership. World Vision International sets the high-level strategic direction and policies for the World Vision Partnership, which World Vision national offices apply in accordance with their local context. World Vision International is also the operating entity for the World Vision offices around the world that have not yet progressed to being separate legal entities with their own boards. (World Vision International, 2010:11)

By creating a supreme governing body on which representatives from both the Global South and North sit, World Vision's structure appears to give more authority and agency to field offices in places like Uganda and Kenya. As of 2020, the board's vice chairperson, Prof. Monica Chibita, is a nominee from Uganda's national office and East Africa's regional office (World Vision International, 2020).

Beyond the representative board, World Vision also holds a triennial conference of National Directors that is charged with adopting and implementing the policies and global strategy proposed to them by the board. Commenting on the effectiveness of this structure, one interviewee pointed out the amount of decentralised power national offices have:

> Some time back, the international board passed a policy that all national offices in Africa do their main banking with ABSA. This was to streamline financial processes across the continent. However, even though that is the guiding principle, individual countries through their boards can say, 'In our context, ABSA is not the best banking partner. We want to use another'. And they can go ahead and do it. The boards also decide which auditors to use so nothing is necessarily forced down on us. By the time a policy is adopted on a global level, the various national and regional offices have had some sort of input. (World Vision Senior Staffer 7)

The organisation's unique approach, however, was not always the norm. Founded in 1950 by an American evangelist, World Vision operated largely as an American INGO, with the US leadership making all the strategic decisions (Bartlett and Curran, 2004). It was not until 1987 at a national directors' meeting that members, led by Egypt, Brazil and Nigeria, objected to this top-down approach and insisted on a more collegial structure (Whaites, 1999). This debate culminated in World Vision US agreeing to cede control of the organisation to a more globally representative body registered as World Vision International. Its former president, Graeme Irvine, observed that to achieve this, all stakeholders had to look beyond form and more to substance.

> The emphasis was not on creating an international partnership. That existed. The emphasis was on how to make it more effective. At heart, however, internationalisation is more than process or structure. It is an attitude. Structure is no substitute for spirit. (as cited in Whaites, 1999:415)

Bartlett and Curran (2004) and Whaites (1999) observed that World Vision's decentralised and federalised system of governance was as much a result of intent as it was the inclusion of diverse voices, particularly from the Global South. This was also emphasised by one of the former INGO workers I spoke to who had knowledge of the organisation's history, particularly in East Africa:

> World Vision's strength has always been in allowing diverse voices in the organisations to be heard. By recognising all national offices as semi-autonomous entities governed by their

> local structures, they enabled African offices to engage with those in the West on far more equitable terms than most organisations. (Former Senior World Vision Employee).

This approach to INGO structuring is gaining popularity among South-based INGO workers looking to challenge the top-down approach most INGOs have. And whereas World Vision employees tend to emphasise that this kind of approach is primarily a matter of attitude, it is clear that the legal and procedural aspects of it are important. Allowing national offices to register as semi-autonomous entities with their own boards and creating a central governing body whose members are nominated from all the national and regional offices regardless of financial capacity was an important starting point in achieving equity. This approach also contrasts with the attitude that 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' expressed by INGO Senior Leader 1.

Another organisation that is attempting to make the transition to this kind of operation is Action Aid. Founded in the UK, the organisation decided to move its global headquarters to Johannesburg in South Africa as a demonstration of its commitment to pursue its development agenda in an equitable manner. Beyond moving the headquarters, the organisation also has a federalised system of governance, with all national offices having equal voting rights. Its board, which is the charged with overseeing the secretariat, currently consists of 12 members. As of 2020, seven of these were African. This is the highest representation of African country offices at the top level in all the five INGOs studied.

However, employees of World Vision and Action Aid offices in Uganda and Kenya noted that representation at a global level was not necessarily a guarantee that there would be a balance of power. In the case of World Vision, employees in both countries expressed the feeling that the priorities of the support offices in the West took precedence over local priorities.

> Okay if you were to investigate the issue from a legal perspective, we are highly federalised and have a decentralised system. But if you look at it in operational terms, that is not necessarily true. If for instance a World Vision office in Europe says they would like a story about a project they are funding, two things happen. First, you really have to work within their preferred timelines and second, they get to decide what aspects of it to emphasize. In reality, sometimes they insist on you sending unedited footage or photos so that they do the production themselves. But if you are saying we are partners and we have our own decision-making organs, shouldn't the story they take be the one we choose to tell? (World Vision Communications Staffer 7)

An Action Aid employee was less subtle:

> Management likes to say we are a decentralised and federal organisation. But you [don't] dare challenge a European member state about the way a programme they are funding is being run or even the way in which they communicate about our work in Africa. They may politely listen to you but completely ignore you. At the end of the day, they feel that because they have the money, they get to call the shots. And for me, I feel like if that's the case, let's admit it instead of pretending. (Action Aid Mid Management Employee)

These opinions are consistent with the sentiments observed during my time in the field and suggest a conflict between the two INGOs' stated intent and actions. On several occasions, I saw that opinions of Western-based colleagues – which in principle could be discussed or challenged – tended to be prioritised over those of locally-based colleagues. In one specific instance, a Communications Manager was discussing the logistics of collecting a story from one of the projects with their team. When a team member suggested spending four days in the field instead of one, the manager dismissed it by pointing to the email they had received from the support office commissioning the assignment. In the email – printed out and shared during the meeting – the requesting party, a Communications Manager from a European Office, had opined that the story did not have to be "very long" and "can be from a day or two in the field".

As with Save the Children and Plan International, therefore, Action Aid's stated intention of working collaboratively and equitably between support offices and field offices is met with operational and perception challenges. Largely, these stem from the sense among South-based employees that the financial power Western offices have usually translates into a top-down relationship. There is however a key difference between World Vision and Action Aid on the one hand and Save the Children and Plan International on the other. The former have evolved their governance structures over the past 30 years to reflect a more inclusive and diverse outlook that gives their offices in Africa more say at a strategic level. The latter, however, have consolidated power in the hands of their support offices as far as their governance structures are concerned.

These are not the only indicators of agency on the part of South-based employees and national offices. As I discuss later, the top-down governance structures discussed here can often be bypassed by collaborative processes of operation that cede agency to South-based staffers. The reverse of Graeme Irvine's statement, quoted above, is true as well. Internationalisation is more than attitude. It includes processes and structures as well. Goodwill is no substitute for institutionalised action. As the next section demonstrates, even the reimagining of regional and national offices as exemplified by Action Aid and Christian Aid betrays a tension between intentions and practice.

6.2.3 Action Aid and Christian Aid: Reimagining Regional Offices

Not all the organisations had regional offices. As seen in Table 3, Christian Aid and Action Aid had no regional offices and therefore no regional Communications Manager in the same manner as Plan International, Save the Children, and World Vision. Instead, their programmes on the continent are coordinated by a team known as the Africa Divisional Management Group, and Africa Regional Team, in Christian Aid and Action Aid respectively. Unlike the other three organisations whose regional employees are hosted in separate regional offices, both Action

Aid and Christian Aid tend to host their equivalent of regional employees in national offices nearest to them or closest to their primary responsibilities.

The reasons for this were both from practical considerations as well as a uniqueness in approach. Practically, both organisations have comparatively smaller operations on the continent. Christian Aid for instance had only 18 national offices in Africa. The Kenyan office, which happened to be the one of the largest on the continent, consisted of 76 employees (interview with Country Director). Action Aid too has only 60 staffers in its Kenyan office (Action Aid International Kenya, 2018). By comparison, World Vision Kenya alone has 733 employees (World Vision Kenya, 2019) while Save the Children Uganda has over 200. Given the relatively small number of employees and operations, both Christian Aid and Action Aid find no real need to have regional offices.

> Sometimes we have employees whose work is regional in the sense that they are responsible for a programme that is being implemented in more than one country. However, what we tend to do is have them hosted in a primary country, for instance Kenya, but with responsibilities that include, say, Malawi. But even that is very rare and limited to short term consultancies or something of the sort. (John Kitui, Christian Aid Kenya)

The second justification for the absence of regional offices by both organisations lies in the way they deliver their programmes. For Action Aid, the bulk of their work is conducted through local partner organisations and social movements rather than their own employees.

> Because a lot of what we do is advocacy, the most effective way of achieving it is by working with grassroot organisations rather than establishing fully fledged Action Aid programmes. In fact, in most cases we don't even brand the projects as ours, but as supported by us. (Action Aid Staffer)

In terms of communications, this approach means having only country-level employees, whose primary responsibility is to train project coordinators as well as members of the local partner organisations on how to write stories, take photographs or videos and send them to the field office. In Kenya for instance, Action Aid has only one communications staffer – referred to as the Communications Manager – responsible for the entire country's office operations. The Federation's Global Communications team – composed of staffers in various locations including London, Kenya and Johannesburg – coordinates the organisation's communication efforts but does not have supervisory powers over the national level Communications Managers. As one interviewee explained:

> In simple terms, Action Aid International is a federation with headquarters, referred to as the Global Secretariat, in Johannesburg and with national offices called Country Programmes. Each Country Programme enjoys a great measure of autonomy from the others, but there is coordination between them, particularly between the offices that provide the bulk of the funding and those that utilise it. (Action Aid Interviewee 2)

This echoes statements made by the Chief Executive of the organisation in 2015, shortly after they had shifted their headquarters from London to Johannesburg.

> Action Aid is not a centralised, top-down structure; it is a global federation that is governed and run by equal members across the world. All our member organisations, wherever they are based, have the same voting power and voice as their European, North American and Australian peers that have traditionally provided most of the funding. (Campolina, 2015)

Similarly, Christian Aid national level Communication Managers report directly to the Country Directors with the Africa Division Communications Manager (based in any Africa national office) and Communication Advisers (based in UK and other national offices) provide coordination support. As the Kenya Country Director explained:

> One of the things we believe in is that actually people who run the projects are probably the better communicators of what is happening, along with the communities themselves. So what the communications roles like the Africa Divisional Communications Manager does, or the global communication [head], is to try to facilitate the staff members who implement these projects to communicate about what they are doing, what it is achieving, how much difference we are making and also to make sure that voice of the community is heard in terms of communicating what their needs are, what their capacities are and what the interventions of Christian Aid are helping them to either mitigate against or to ride on to get out of poverty. (Christian Aid's John Kitui)

However, this decentralisation of communications functions has several repercussions. First, it side-lines communications, making it a marginal function and only an added responsibility or activity for staffers employed primarily to implement programmes. While this model envisages a programme manager as the best spokesperson for the project they oversee, such employees are hired primarily as development workers, with the bulk of their responsibilities focused on programme delivery, not communications. Ultimately, they very rarely communicate what they do by taking photos, videos or writing stories and even then, after several prompts from the Communications Manager. Even when they do produce these communication items, the quality is often not as good as expected by the communications teams, owing in part to their lack of technical knowledge.

In theory, the Communications Manager is tasked with equipping these programme staffers with the skills necessary to produce quality communications material. In practice, however, this is a hugely time-consuming task, requiring not only that the Communications Manager devotes almost all their time to training field employees, but that field staffers dedicate a huge portion of their time to gathering and producing stories, photos and videos. As this is not their primary function and there are other competing demands on the Communications Manager's time, communication products end up being produced as and when there is specific demand for them rather than as an integral part of the organisation's programming. A Communications Manager for one of the two organisations put it this way:

> Very often I am overwhelmed by the needs and find myself spread out too thin… As a result, it can sometimes feel like all I am doing is firefighting, moving from one story request to another. Of course, there are some programme staff who are proactive and reach out to you with pitches, stories, or advocacy op-eds, but those are the exceptional cases. Usually, you must be the one looking for stories. (INGO Communications Manager)

Moreover, even if the Communications Manager were to somehow manage to make the time to train field employees, there is little motivation for field staffers to prioritise the production of communication materials given that their performance is measured primarily based on programme delivery. Communications managers of both Action Aid and Christian Aid in Kenya acknowledged that the organisations' approach of decentralising communication made the possibility of it being side-lined very real.

> Remember, for this approach to work, there is a sense in which all the programme staff being trained in communications need to learn and master what is being taught at the same pace. But of course, this is not what happens. Some get it better and faster than others, so you end up with a particular programme or project doing very well in terms of providing stories, photos and videos, while another struggles. But remember it isn't their core responsibility so you cannot even hold them accountable. It is us who get to be questioned. (INGO Communications Manager)

Moreover, this approach did not necessarily result in a bottom-up production of communication material that was significantly different from the other INGOs. For instance, in 2019, a total of 53 stories were posted on Christian Aid's UK website. Without exception, they all highlighted key advocacy issues that Christian Aid and its partners are involved in addressing as well as the contributions the organisation has made towards achieving their stated goals. A combination of journalistic style and promotional information was used in all of them, fitting the pattern discussed in section 4.2. A relatively high number of the stories (14) were credited to non-communication staff members of the organisation. This contrasted with World Vision Uganda, for instance, whose 37 stories posted in 2018 were all written or produced by the communications team. On the face of it, this appears to support the country director's claim that the organisation views communications staffers' role as that of facilitating programme implementation employees and the communities they work in to do the storytelling.

However, an analysis of the 14 stories reveals that four were written by Country Directors, five by senior staffers employed at global level and only five by national-level mid management or junior employees. Moreover, the Communications Manager in Kenya revealed that his work involved drafting most of the stories or communication material credited to senior staff members, including the national director. In spite of this push to centre the voices and stories of the communities they work in, Christian Aid's website in 2019 carried no story directly credited to a partner organisation or individual beneficiary.

Furthermore, although programme staffers tend to be credited as the authors of policy briefs, advocacy op-eds or other such public information material, it is the communications departments that are often charged with drafting or editing the work. In Christian Aid, this is particularly the case given how small the communication departments are.

> Yes, we normally try to make sure that technical staff members or our partners tell their story in their own voice. It not only ensures authenticity but is also a form of participatory programming where the beneficiary or those involved in delivering the programme tell their story first-hand rather than through the lens of a communications person. But because these people are not necessarily writers and for purposes of adhering to our communications and branding policies, I look at the story and make the necessary edits to it before sending it to the global office. (David Mudachi, Christian Aid Kenya)

The lack of difference in communication style between Christian Aid – which relies heavily on non-specialist employees for their communication material – and the other organisations with sizeable communications teams raises two concerns relevant to this research. The first is whether elaborate national, regional and global communication structures are necessary for the success of INGOs' promotional, fundraising and advocacy efforts. Christian Aid and, to some extent, Action Aid, provide good examples of where communication has been infused within programme implementation such that development workers' and beneficiaries' voices and perspectives are foregrounded. They are in theory empowered to communicate their work, experiences and opinions directly to target audiences with very little need for promotional intermediaries. This approach strengthens INGOs' claim of engaging in participatory communication and elevating the voices of those they serve.

On the other hand, this approach gives recipients of INGO communication material the illusion that they are hearing directly from the 'field' when the information is actually highly selective, produced mostly by senior staff members, edited and influenced by promotional intermediaries (Communications Managers) and mostly a continuation of INGOs' centralised communication practices. What the public and INGOs' audiences receive therefore can be more accurately described as marketing communications, aimed primarily at achieving their promotional goals rather than providing a platform for authentic, unfiltered perspectives of their beneficiaries. With the plummeting public trust in institutions (Ongenaert, 2019; Seu, 2015; Ossewaarde et al., 2008; Lader, 2007), INGOs can ill afford to engage in communication strategies that could potentially lower their standing in the public sphere further.

This apparent contradiction is solved when one considers the moral economy of it. As discussed in section 4.4, moral economy approaches take into consideration the "moral values informing particular economic arrangements and institutions" (Hesmondhalgh, 2017:6). These seemingly conflicting outcomes could therefore be viewed as a (re)adjustment of the communications function in INGOs to the political and financial predicaments on the ground (Friberg and Götz, 2015). Politically, INGOs are increasingly under pressure from supporters, donors and the public to demonstrate that they are legitimate representatives of the poor and marginalised, for whom they claim to mobilise and work. Financially however, the fundraising and advocacy realities of international development remain unchanged – with Western audiences and institutions being the main sources of financing and advocacy. Caught between the political and economic realities of the sector, INGOs make public claims of being channels of local empowerment, but do so using a highly controlled, centralised hierarchical system that prioritises the financial needs of the organisation over their beneficiaries' unfiltered voice. The perspectives and voice of those they serve are therefore only amplified to the extent that they positively contribute to the organisational goals.

Operationally, communications as a function remains both independent of those implementing development programmes and structurally unempowered to hold them accountable. This means that although INGOs appear to uphold participatory methodologies, local agency is limited in practice, exercised mostly through personal initiatives and informal intra-organisational relationships, rather than formal governance and accountability structures. Communications managers are limited in their authority and resort to these informal relationships with senior managers and regional office teams to influence and encourage programme staffers to produce communication material. They do so primarily to meet the INGOs' economic (marketing and promotional) goals and expectations of their jobs. As the examination of Christian Aid's communication output on their website in 2018 and 2019 reveals, this is not always successful. This results in a disconnect between what these INGOs say they do and what they do in regard to the communications function.

Next, I move the focus to the national office communication teams and the ways in which they negotiate, renegotiate, and retain agency both in regard to the national office agenda and that of their organisations' headquarters.

6.3 The Remaking of a Communications Department

Bella Nyamamu is a Communications Manager at Save the Children Kenya. Reporting to the Head of Media and Advocacy, she supervises a team consisting of a Communications Coordinator and a Communications Officer. The entire department is responsible for all the organisation's in-country communications needs as well as dealing with requests from support offices. This set-up is replicated in most of the 21 other African countries in which the INGO operates although in some country offices, the department is headed by a Director of Communications and Advocacy.

To coordinate cross-border and regional operations across Africa, Save the Children has two regional offices: East and Southern Africa; and West and Central Africa. The former is located in Kenya, within the same compound as the national offices. A Regional Communications and Media Manager is appointed to oversee and coordinate the organisation's communication efforts within and by the various national offices within the region. Although the heads of Media and Advocacy for each country office report to the respective national directors, they are also functionally coordinated and managed by the regional communications and media manager. These multiple, overlapping reporting lines can sometimes be problematic.

For instance, while the Regional Communications and Media Manager is responsible for drafting a communications strategy and coordinating its implementation by the national offices, the heads of communications, media and advocacy at national offices tend to come up with national strategies based on their country office's strategy rather than that of the head of regional communications. As I found out in the initial process of seeking interviews, national offices ultimately have the authority to override advice provided by regional offices, even though this tends to be avoided as much as possible (for purposes of cohesion). When the Regional Communications Manager received my request for access to Save the Children's offices in Kenya and Uganda, she forwarded it to the respective national offices, clearly indicating that it was up to them to decide whether or not to accept the request. Likewise, when I approached the Regional Communications and Media Manager for an interview with her, she forwarded my request to the country office, insisting that I deal with them first. It became clear that she viewed her role more as a support function rather than an implementing one as described in the job description.

However, at both the Uganda and Kenya offices, the forwarded email was perceived as 'clearance' from the regional offices to engage me and no further vetting or questions were asked. In Kenya, this perceived approval played a role in fast-tracking my access to the INGO's communications department as I was on several occasions introduced to staff members as the researcher that "the Regional Office was talking about" or recommended.

Moreover, the organisation's job descriptions for regional and national staffers make it clear that the former take precedence over the latter. For instance, the Country Directors, who are responsible for the organisation's national operations in any given country, report to the regional directors (see Appendix VI under 'Scope of Role'). Similarly, while national office departmental heads directly report to the country director, all those I interacted with explained that they are functionally supervised by the respective technical heads at the regional office.

Despite this elaborate chain of command, Nyamamu does not feel that the communications function is as valued as it should be. She put it this way:

> For a very long time, communications was actually seen as a fringe support function. So when visitors come in you are there to take pictures. It was never quite seen as a function that can successfully tell the story of a project being implemented, whether successfully or not. (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children)

This was particularly true of her initial months at the organisation. During this period, she felt that the communications function was not taken seriously enough as a critical part of the organisation's programming:

> We were like that last person that they thought of when the project is wrapping up… I would see stories being sent to me to edit for the sake of them being included in the report... that was the only reason why the stories were being taken and my role seemed to be only to edit for purpose of accounting to the donors. (Bella Nyamunu, Save the Children)

This, she felt, was the opposite of what INGO communications should be about. And yet as frustrating as this was, it was not new to her or other communications workers in the INGOs I interacted with. An interviewee at Plan International lamented about how the communication function is far too often seen as "paparazzi" by their colleagues – only there to take photos at important functions or follow the programme employees around as they did the core work.

> They will remember you when it is time to take a group photo of programmes staff that were being trained on how to implement a certain project or ask you to help design certificates of participation, but when it comes to participating in that training, no one stops to think that maybe communications people should be here. (Plan International Communications Staffer 5)

However, instead of accepting this apathy towards communications, Nyamamu decided to change things, believing that it was her responsibility to restructure the department's role in the organisation and demonstrate to colleagues what she viewed as the right position of communication in the implementation process. As one of her initial actions to remedy the situation, she invested in getting the support of the organisation's senior management. She explained that convincing the leadership to appreciate the role of communications was not only beneficial to the department's relevance, but also the organisation's public profile.

> It doesn't matter how much good work you are doing in the field. If no one is hearing about it, then you are not going to have the impact you seek. The donors may get their report, but then what? How about the larger community here? How about the individual sponsors who give because of the impact they have been shown? (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children)

This emphasis on the importance of communications in public perception and fundraising was significant in two ways. First, it revealed a consistency with previous studies that have highlighted a rapid rise of promotional culture within the development sector. Powers (2018:52) for instance argues that INGOs view communication "as a way to boost their brands and raise funds", while Enghel and Noske-Turner (2018a:1) argue that very little is known about how INGOs' efforts to do good overlaps with their need to look good. By insisting on her department's responsibility to both document and publicise the organisation's work, Nyamamu demonstrates the primacy of promotion in INGO communications.

Second, it demonstrates the complex ways in which communication for and about development – academically conceived as two distinct fields – are intertwined in practice. This disconnect between scholarship and practice has previously been identified by Waisbord (2011), Wilkins

(2017) and Enghel and Noske-Turner (2018a). Scholarship on this subject, however, has been limited, the result being a continued separation of the two fields in academic inquiry. From Nyamamu's perspective though, doing development is largely made possible by telling the story of how and why it is being done. Likewise, the publicity and awareness that comes out of communicating about development provides the basis of engaging programme staffers on how to use communication tools to do their work better.

The proactive steps taken by Nyamamu to challenge the status quo and renegotiate the place of Communications within the organisation was consistent with what Margaret Archer defined as a meta reflexive mode (discussed in Chapter 4.3). According to her, meta reflexives tend to be activist in nature, not only circumventing constraints or opportunities but trying to find change them altogether. In this case, Nyamamu was dissatisfied with the position the communication department she led held within the organisation and set about to increase its agency and prominence.

However, because there appeared to be little appreciation among the organisation's leadership for the communication department's potential, Nyamamu and her colleagues were not only frustrated but feared that Save the Children would fail to achieve its advocacy objectives, brand recognition and even fundraising goals. To her, the organisation's very survival depended on effective communications. Moreover, her perception of an effective INGO communications structure pervaded every aspect of the organisation's operations. Simply providing a satisfactory activity report to donors would not be enough. They also had to engage with the beneficiary communities and get them to see the impact the organisation was having, and the communications department was the one to spearhead such efforts.

This view was widely shared by other communications workers that I interviewed and observed, with one of them even asserting that INGO communications only made sense if it was conceived as part of the programming rather than a support function.

> Some years ago, maybe you could say communications was a support service. But today, I cannot see how an INGO that is serious about achieving its financial or even advocacy goals can do so without allowing the communications people to be core implementers of the programmes. It's not just about donor reports or fundraising, it's also about how we communicate with our beneficiaries. Most development initiatives are now tied to behavioural change, which in itself requires effective change communication… In fact, some INGOs are even focused solely on behavioural change communication as their programme implementation strategy. (World Vision Communications Staffer 3)

The same interviewee noted that this view – while widely held by communications workers in development – was not always shared by colleagues in other departments or even senior leadership. The interviewee argued that this was less common than it was a decade ago or earlier and that the communications function was much more recognised as critical to the successful implementation of INGO programmes.

For Nyamamu and other INGO Communication workers, getting the support of management required informal, interpersonal skills. Building strategic professional relationships with other departments would create opportunities for the department to demonstrate its usefulness beyond the paparazzi role they were often relegated to.

> If for example there is going to be a meeting by the programmes people, instead of waiting to be called for the group photo opportunity at the end, I had to be proactive. I would engage the programme manager weeks in advance to know what the meeting was about. If it included things like sharing lessons learnt or best practices, I would sit down with my team and think, 'how can we be of use to them?' Sometimes, that translated into having the local media come and cover the event. Other times, we would help prepare a report about the meeting and package it as a highlight to share with partners or donors. It is these kinds of things that get you noticed. (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children)

Nyamamu also invested time in knowing what the Country Director's vision for the organisation was and tried to figure out how her function could support this vision.

> I asked myself, what does [the] leadership want to achieve as a country programme? Knowing what they wanted to achieve, I had to answer the question of how I could help them achieve that first. I came up with a comprehensive communications strategy that fed into the country office strategic goals. That then made them realise that I am actually useful… that I have the potential to take them where they want to go. That then opened the door for me to begin saying, 'Ok, here's what I need from you to deliver. And here's what I need from the other departments'. (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children)

A key item in the communication strategy was how to increase the organisation's visibility on the national scene as well as within the support offices. The logic here was that as the national office's work became more known by national and international audiences, there would be a desire for more publicity and promotion, which would ultimately mean that the communications department's importance also increased.

This focus on building relationships as a way of gaining influence was not limited to the national office. It was also important when it came to having the stories they collected highlighted and used by the support offices. It also required that they build relationships with implementing partners and field staffers in remote areas.

> Those staffers working upcountry are very important to the strategy. That is where the stories are. The sponsorship officers for instance interact with the children and community regularly as part of their daily routine. They would be the first people to know of a good success story. If you concentrate on building relationships with the managers at head office, but do not build your network in the field, you may get an audience [with management] and have nothing to say. (Bella Nyamumu, Save the Children)

Across all five INGOs, interviewees were unanimous in their belief that locally-based communications workers and departments that successfully built these relationships tended to have their work recognised and used more than those who did not. Another interviewee working with World Vision noted that although it may not be part of the communications practitioners' core responsibilities, their career progress depended on it: "You can be the best storyteller, photographer or videographer, but if you do not work on your relationships within the organisation, your work will be put aside in preference of those with connections" (World Vision Communications Staffer).

The importance of initiating these informal relationships extends to editorial agency. When Nyamamu had just joined Save the Children, what was most expected of her was to provide a specific number of stories per month. Instead of focusing on meeting her quota, she decided to focus on expanding it. Whenever she received a story assignment, she would go to the field and collect three or four other stories. After submitting the one that was requested, she would also pitch the ones she had collected either to the same support office or another. Not long after she started pitching stories, she began to get recognised and singled out by both management at the national office as well as support offices as a resourceful Communications Manager in relation to promoting the organisation and its work.

> I would get an email from a support office saying something like 'I saw the story you sent through about our WASH programme. It was really great. Could you get us another from this project?' And before you know it, instead of being asked to send a particular story, you will be asked if you have any stories about a particular advocacy theme. Or your opinion will be sought when assignments are being made rather than simply being told what to do. (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children)

Similarly, in Plan International's Kenya office, this personal initiative became an important part of what the Communications Manager expected of her team. They allocated time in their weekly departmental meetings to discuss story assignments from support offices as well as original story ideas that they had come up with. Once they had agreed on which ideas to pursue, they would align the story ideas they had come up with and those they had been assigned.

> If a certain donor wants a story about female genital mutilation and we were thinking of generating some media attention about the same programme here in Kenya, then whoever is going to the field to collect the donor story is also assigned the task of sourcing another

> for our local use or even to pitch to another support office. (Dorcas Odhiambo, Plan International)

During my participant observation with the organisation, one such arrangement was made for stories to be collected from a small coastal village of Kwale. The area had been flooded after heavy rains that lasted for weeks, displacing hundreds of people. As part of its response to the humanitarian crisis, the communication team was tasked with carrying out an impact assessment. This was to be fed into a standard situation report to be shared with the support offices to help secure funding. The communications team, however, felt that simply getting the information required for the situation report would be a waste of an opportunity, especially considering that the journey to the location was by a chartered plane – an extremely expensive undertaking.

> If we are going to charter a plane to and from an inaccessible place like Kwale, then we need to ensure that you maximise the trip. Yes, we can provide what is expected of us and call it a day, but it would make more sense to generate even more content. As the communications department, we need to think beyond the bare minimum. (Dorcas Odhiambo, Plan International)

The team proceeded to collect the information needed for the situation report as well as twelve case studies of families and individuals who had been affected by the floods. For each case, photos were taken of the affected people, their property, as well as activity photos such as a mother carrying her child on her back and crossing a flooded area with some household items on her head. As Odhiambo explained, these photos could be used in multiple ways. Beyond the immediate story of the floods, such a photo could be used to highlight the organisation's humanitarian responses across the country, as a background image for any of the various branded material or for internal newsletters to employees.

This reusability of communication material collected in specific contexts for a wide range of promotional communication enhances the department's ability to pitch story and branding ideas to both the national office and support offices in the West. While this makes for convenient INGO communications, it also tends to essentialise the stories of beneficiaries. Stripped of context, the picture of the mother carrying her baby across a flooded area could have been taken anywhere in Africa, from Kwale in Nairobi to Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. That it can be used on a variety of branding materials, from national office reports to tear-drop banners, means that it can also be given meanings other than the one in which it was taken. This is especially the case when such material is shared with the support offices, who use photos and video footage to mobilise money for their work globally rather than for country-specific programmes. The mother in Kwale could for instance be used by the UK office of Plan International to fundraise for work being done in 'Africa' or used as part of a seasonal fundraising appeal. Consequently, the individual initiatives of communications employees to produce material that justifies their (department's) relevance to the organisation also end up contributing to the essentialisation of Africa and Africans.

It also demonstrates African INGO workers' extraversion tactics at both individual and institutional levels. As discussed in section 2.5, extraversion refers to the exploitation of a dependent relationship for the purposes of appropriating resources and authority (Peiffer and Englebert, 2012). At an individual level, these national office communications employees use their positions at the bottom of the hierarchy to grow their profiles both within and outside the organisations they work for. With every successful story pitch and production, they gain recognition as creative and motivated employees. In certain cases, moving stories, images or videos are noticed by senior leadership at headquarters and can result in promotions to regional or global roles. One of the interviewees recounted an assignment in which they were deployed in a humanitarian emergency in one of the East African countries. They successfully pitched some of the stories they got to international media, including the BBC and AFP. Their photos were also used in appeals and advocacy campaigns by the organisation and as a result, over

£200,000 was raised (email correspondence between the INGO's national office and UK support office shown to me). Within three months of the assignment, the interviewee was promoted to a regional position within the organisation.

Institutionally, the work produced by these communications employees helps raise funds for the INGOs they work with as well as their institutional profiles in the estimation of the public, policymakers, supporters and funders who get to know what the organisation is doing, how it is doing it and how they (publics) can be a part of it.

So far, I have focused the discussion on the personal initiatives and relationships built by INGO communications workers as the basis for effective extraversion tactics. However, agency within some of these organisations is becoming institutionalised, with more authority being delegated to national office communications workers – the next section engages with this.

6.4 Institutional Agency and Personal Initiative

Not all impact or influence is dependent on communications workers' personal initiative and the building of relationships with leadership and support offices. Over the past decade, INGOs' support offices have increasingly been deferring editorial power to national offices. From deciding which stories get written to vetoing the publication of a story based on concerns such as the dignity of the subjects, national offices are beginning to have a greater say in the kind of stories that are written and told about Save the Children's work in Africa.

> If, for instance, a media team from the Save the Children UK comes here in Kenya and gathers certain stories that they find relevant to their fundraising or reporting, they normally are required to send us a final copy of the story or video for approval. If we feel strongly about a certain aspect of the story, we can flag it and either insist on it being corrected or ask that the story is not published. (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children)

This increase in agency is a result of several factors. First, as Ossewaarde et al. (2008), Franks (2013), Council of Europe (2015) and Powers (2018) have all previously noted, INGOs have moved towards the professionalisation of INGO communication. Far from their humble beginnings in which they relied on external agencies, INGOs have greatly improved their technical capacities in field offices, with national offices hiring highly trained and experienced communications personnel (Powers, 2018:27; Wright, 2018; Madon, 1999). All the communications workers I interviewed had at least an undergraduate degree and two years of experience in communication or journalism prior to taking up their current posts. For her part, Nyamamu has a diploma and BA in Communications and prior to her current position had worked as a production and graphics coordinator for Nation Media, one of East Africa's largest media companies. She had also worked with the United Nations and in the regional office of Plan International. Altogether, she had almost a decade's experience in communication at both national and regional levels.

With highly professional and experienced communications workers in field offices, INGOs are more comfortable ceding more editorial and production control to field offices. But even in the absence of these professionals, the development sector's gradual move towards bottom-up, participatory approaches means that INGOs are now under pressure – in both the West and Africa – to not only rethink their editorial agency to allow for local participation, but also to be seen to do so. In Kenya, for instance, all five of the INGOs studied are members of the Participatory Methodologies Forum of Kenya (PAMFORK), a network whose mission – as suggested in the name – is to advocate for the adoption of participatory methods of operation by development actors, particularly INGOs (Wakwabubi, 2011).

With growing scrutiny over the extent to which INGOs are truly representatives of those they claim to serve (Dogra, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2010; Khor, 2010), giving locally-based employees more say in the story production processes is both politically and practically logical. Even internally, most INGO employees appear to be supportive of this move.

> [Locally-based INGO communication workers] are the ones that are on the frontlines of the development work. They know what is happening on the ground. So support offices and even us at the regional offices need to try as much as possible to trust their judgement and listen to what they tell us – whether it is communications or programmes. (Save the Children Regional Office Staffer)

Despite this apparent support for participatory methodologies and empowerment of locally-based staffers, Nyamamu does not necessarily feel that INGO communications workers are taken as seriously as they should be. This perspective is consistent with the argument made earlier in the chapter that communications processes adopted by INGOs are primarily aimed at fulfilling their promotional goals and only engage participatory approaches to the extent that they contribute to achieving these goals.

> I think the NGOs still have a long way to go because the role of communications has not yet been appreciated as much as it should be. Even when I talk to my colleagues out there in different organisations, they don't get involved in the initial processes such as proposal development, fundraising or even programme implementation. They just call us when they want impact stories at the end of the project or in the middle of it if they want more funding or a good report. But then as soon as we deliver the story, we are out again. (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children)

Relatedly, whereas there appears to be an ideological consensus within most INGOs in favour of participatory methodologies, the extent of agency that locally-based communications workers have is often very precarious. Since communications departments are often under the oversight of non-specialist managers, communications staffers' best chance at influencing the editorial agenda lies in building and exploiting strong relationships with programme staffers. This often leads to regular – and sometimes contentious – internal negotiations and compromises about stories. In many of my interviews with locally-based communications staffers, most acknowledged having more agenda-setting influence (about what to cover) on the one hand and a lack of agency in regard to narrative framing (how to cover it) on the other. Even this influence is often achieved through personal initiative rather than institutional mandate, as the next section explains.

6.4.1 Negotiating from the Fringe: The Positioning of Communications Departments

One of the biggest challenges for INGO communications in Uganda and Kenya is the positioning of communications departments in an organisation's hierarchy. Most of them tend to put the communications department under non-specialist leadership. In the case of World Vision, for instance, the Communications Manager at the time of conducting the research reported to the country director. However, unlike all the other positions that report to the country director, the Communications Manager is not part of the Senior Leadership Team. This was the same for Save the Children Kenya, Action Aid in Uganda and Kenya, as well as Plan International Kenya.[13]

For many of these workers, therefore, there appear to be two major disconnects. The first is that while INGO communication has generally evolved towards ceding more editorial and production power to national offices, this power is often controlled by national office leaders with limited technical knowledge, experience or training in communications. As discussed in the first part of this chapter, this is because communications departments are still largely seen as fringe rather than core members of the development project. The extent to which national office communications personnel can influence the content and nature of communications

[13] In 2020, World Vision Uganda restructured the communications department, elevating it to a division with a Director of Communications and Marketing, who is a member of the Senior Leadership Team. Likewise, Save the Children in Uganda created the position of Head of Communications and Advocacy, also graded as part of the Senior Leadership Team. As these developments occurred after my data collection, I limited my analysis to the situation as it was prior to these changes, although I discuss their potential in the concluding chapter.

material is therefore often driven more by programme implementation managers than Communications Managers.

What this ultimately means is that INGO communications is overseen by leaders that are not primarily employed for their technical expertise in communication. Most INGOs field offices are focused on programme implementation public relations or 'doing good' (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018a) rather than fundraising and public engagement – or 'looking good' – which tends to be the preserve of their offices in the West and parts of the East. As such, Country Directors tend to be chosen based on experience in programme delivery, supply chain management and other such functions that are seen as core to the organisation's work (Jayawickrama, 2011:10). Consequently, while in practice many of them defer technical decisions to their communications teams, Country Directors and their programme implementation leadership teams ultimately bear the responsibility of the kind of stories that come out of the organisation's national office. This can pose huge operational challenges for communications workers, in which their professional advice is challenged or even overridden by programme-oriented managers based on non-communications-specific reasons.

An illustration of such an occurrence was shared by an interviewee who remembered getting frustrated after a photo and story they produced of children the organisation sponsored fetching water from a borehole (that was drilled by another organisation) was used in the organisation's Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) report.

For their part, the programmes team, particularly the WASH leadership, felt that whereas the photo may have been taken with a focus on the child, the organisation was indeed involved in the drilling boreholes in communities across the country. As such, the photo corresponded with the information in the report about the organisation's efforts to make clean water more accessible to hard-to-reach communities. In their estimation, that this specific borehole was not drilled by the organisation was of no consequence as to whether or not to use the photo.

The communications team on the other hand felt that since this was a photo they had produced, with a specific focus on the child rather than the borehole, they had a moral responsibility to use it ethically. For them, this meant not using it as an illustration of the organisation's WASH programmes.

> The problem wasn't the photo. It was the context [in which it was used]. The text seemed to suggest that we had built the borehole as part of our programme. In fact, that particular borehole had been built by another organisation and my focus had been on the child, who was one of our sponsored children. I tried to explain to the programmes people that it was misleading, but they had the final say on the report! (INGO Communications Staffer 13)

What such experiences reveal is that INGOs are not institutions of homogenous thought in which all involved agree with each other about what to say and how to say it. Instead, competing interests and agendas influence what stories are successfully published. These agendas not only impact the kinds of stories that make it through the production process, but also those that get into it in the first place. Partly because of the child's photo being used the way it was, the communications team decided that in the future, they would focus more on the quality of the photos they take than the context.

> At that point, I realised that sometimes in our work, context is not as important as the quality of the photo. That is why most INGOs have stockpile photos that they can go back to and use over and over again in different contexts. As a former journalist, I thought it was wrong. But… we are communicators for the organisation, not journalists. So while for a journalist, the photo has a single story behind it, for us, a smiling child could mean he or she is well fed, or happy about going to school, or safe from harm. (INGO Communications Staffer 13)

While this tendency to use generic images with more emphasis on quality than context is generally on the rise within visual communication industries (see Aiello et al., 2016; Frosh and Society, 2001), the transformation of the employees' way of thinking was also a result of this constant conflict in agendas and that their perspective(s) were constantly overridden by other non-technical employees. This is consistent with the argument that INGOs are sites of "dynamic cooperation and conflict among [their] partners" (DeMars, 2005: p45). While the communications workers and colleagues in the programmes department generally agreed with and worked towards the same organisational goals, their personal perspective about how to do this and their agendas while doing it were in conflict. The report in question and accompanying photo were constructed as a result of the merging of one perspective into another.

Relatedly, interviewees identified the siloed nature of programming within the sector as yet another disabling factor. At any given time, INGOs have several funding streams, with many donors having different reporting and implementation schedules, even when these programmes are targeting the same community. One participant put it this way:

> You will find a health programme that has very detailed data about how many children are coming to the clinic, what diseases and all that, but they've not gone to the point of making connections of the why. And maybe as a communicator you're stumbling on it and you want to follow that path, but because the systems around have not looked at it in that way, you're finding a dead end – and normally you are operating within time. And so, you may not get the kind of data to strengthen your view or position. You might have a hunch that this is a good story, but because of the way the programmes are structured, you're only getting information from one and not the other at that particular time. (Former World Vision Communications Staffer)

The result of such siloed programming is that communicators end up documenting only INGOs' work in staggered phases, with the focus being the impact envisaged by the donor of a particular programme rather than the bigger picture of the community's overall progress. In so doing, progress made in one area of programming (such as education) gets to be omitted in stories documenting challenges in another area (for example, health). The picture painted by such siloed reporting is what Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie referred to as true but incomplete: providing factually accurate accounts of certain aspects of the community's condition but lacking the context of others.

In order to get the complete picture and holistic story, communicators would need to not only get in touch with various programme managers, but they would also likely need to do so at different times given that the different projects are implemented at different times. As discussed earlier, however, donors' reporting timelines are different and often inflexible and programme leaders are not always accessible or keen on providing cross-programme information. Even if communicators succeeded in overcoming these challenges, what they would have are stories that tell a holistic story of INGOs' work but that are too broad to fit into the donors' expectations or specific advocacy goals within the sector.

In summary, INGO communications workers are often working around a schedule and agenda dictated by funding and advocacy factors rather than those of the beneficiaries. Moreover, it is their colleagues in programme implantation that have the ability to negotiate or contest these factors with donors or Western offices. To that end, communications workers are often limited in terms of their agency.

6.4.2 Extent of Local Workers' Agency: A Case of Agenda Setting

Sometimes the influence on communication products comes from the communication workers. National office communication employees can in several instances change the story direction to suit their perspective. In one of the INGOs' Kenya offices, the communications team once escorted a Media Team sent by one of the organisation's donor offices to the field. As part of their field visit, they met children within the beneficiary community, some of whom were naked and playing in a muddy pond. The Media Team, eager to highlight the plight of the community and scarcity of clean water sources, moved to take photos of the playing children.

At this point, the national communications team interjected, insisting that such photos would not be consistent with their understanding of respecting the dignity of beneficiaries, a core communications value within most INGOs (Dogra, 2012; Crewe and Harrison, 2002).

> Photos of naked children are a no-no for me personally. Their argument was that this was the reality and, in a sense, they were right. But there are different ways to show that reality without compromising on the beneficiary's dignity. For me personally, it was a big no. I know some people in the office who would have agreed with the Media Team, but I was in control and ultimately, it was up to me to make the call. And I said no. (INGO Communications Staffer 7)

Eventually, the Media Team relented and took photographs of the children fully dressed and fetching water from the muddy pond as they would normally do. The communications staffer involved in this negotiation indicated that they viewed this particular incident as an example of how local staffers can exercise their agency in the story production process. This view was shared by several communications staff members from other INGOs, with some even saying they stopped media teams sent from Western or Eastern offices from publishing entire stories months after the team had visited beneficiary communities.

Another way that staffers felt they had some form of agency over the story production process of stories collected by Western media teams was through the initial preparations. As hosts to the media teams, the locally-based staff members get to organise the team's visit beforehand. This includes selecting which community or individual beneficiary to visit and which projects will be the focus of the media team's field trip.

> They give us a general idea of what kind of story they want, but we are the ones who get to choose who they will interview to get that story. So if for instance I feel that there is a success story that is better than the one they initially had in mind, I can influence them towards it. Sometimes their requirements are very specific and there's no room for this, but often times, they are very quick to defer choices of who to interview to us who are on the ground. (INGO Communications Staffer 13)

There were, however, two important caveats to local workers' agency in such situations. First, explaining the extent of their control, one communications staffer noted that although they have some control over what these teams from donor offices write about, film or photograph, they do not have that much control over how the stories are written. In other words, their ability to influence the narrative framing in cases where a Western/Eastern office sends a media team is limited. This was especially true because the general direction or theme of the story was predetermined by the visiting media team from the very start and formed part of the parameters given to local staff members to select potential subjects for the story. So, while the local communications staff member was able to stop the media team from taking photos of naked children playing in dirty water, the story still focused on those children and the dirty water they were playing in.

Secondly, as discussed earlier in the chapter, the ability of locally-based staff members to stop or change the focus of the media team is largely dependent on the informal relationships and trust they have built with the senior leadership. In cases where the Communications Manager or officer had a strong collegial relationship with senior management, particularly the national director or programme director, they were more assertive and confident in exercising their editorial power or agency. This was usually attained through intentionally socialising at various functions in and outside office. This ultimately meant that those with greater social skills tended to gain more agency than those who did not, regardless of whether their technical competencies were better.

However, there were cases in which the locally-based communication staff members felt they did not have the full support or backing of management and therefore were not as assertive.

> Here, staff employed in the programme implementation departments see themselves as the real engine of the organisation. We in communications are seen as just supporting them or as cameramen… They call us 'paparazzi', as if we are not part of the organisation but just

journalists who are called upon to take photos here and there, then leave the big people to do the real work! (INGO Communications Staffer 12)

Being categorized as a support function, therefore, seems to be interpreted by both the communication teams and other staff members to imply that communications is not core to the organisation's operations. As a result of this and the reporting structures that have them listed under non-technical workers, communications workers appear to lose a significant amount of agency over their work.

This is in direct contrast to what senior management would like to think or even what some Communications Managers believe the communications function to be. One Communications Manager, responding to this observation, was very defensive of the organisation's structure:

> Communications is part of the programmes department, advocacy department, human resources and so on. At the end of the day, all those would like to showcase what we are doing and we are the ones that help do this. Most of the campaigns we are doing, communications is at the heart of showcasing. Before, we were on the fringes, but we have raised our voices as a department and become involved in all branches of the organisation's work. (INGO Communications Manager 2)

Overall, however, there was an acknowledgement among most interviewees that communications was at some point viewed as being on the organisation's fringes and change only came after a conscious, concerted effort on the part of the department.

6.5 Reflections and Conclusion

This chapter discusses three key issues. First, although INGOs seem to be in the process of devolving power to locally-based staffers, Western conceptualizations of Africa remain the most powerful determinants of INGOs' organisational structuring. Whereas African countries already have regional blocs such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), and Southern African Development

Community (SADC), INGOs tend to formulate their own conceptualisations of African regions based primarily on the countries in which they operate. In specific regard to INGO communications, the function and staffers in field offices are often treated as marginal by both national leadership and programme implementation staffers. This is in part because field offices tend to be focused on programme implementation based on funding generated by offices in the West and East. Promotional activities such as story production, branding and public relations are largely seen as serving the needs of Western offices, which use the communication material produced for fundraising, advocacy and public awareness for audiences in the West/East. Another reason for this side-lining of the communications function is the tendency to position it under programme-oriented departments with leaders who have limited technical knowledge of communications.

Secondly, although INGOs appear to uphold participatory methodologies, in practice, local agency is exercised through personal initiatives and informal intra-organisational relationships, rather than formal governance and accountability structures. This is in part a consequence of the structural positioning of those officially accountable for producing communications material – the communications teams. They often have no official/formal powers to make demands of programme staffers. They neither supervise programme staffers (directly or indirectly) nor formerly contribute to their performance appraisal. From the programme staffers' perspective, given that the production of communication materials does not contribute to their performance appraisal and there are several competing demands that do, there is little motivation to prioritise it regularly. The way they see it, it is not their job. When they do collaborate with the communications team, it is often because they have chosen to rather than because they have to. As one Communications Manager put it, "it is like they are doing us a favour".

In a sense, the communication function can be understood here as "socially distributed in unequal ways and has an ambiguous potential" (Enghel, 2014 as cited in Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018a:2). The overall intention of the INGOs appears to be the increased participation in the communication of development by those most intimately involved in it. They attempt to devolve communications for and about development by not only centring the development worker's voice, but also by doing so in their promotional and advocacy efforts. However, these intentions are at odds with the organisations' structures and mode of operation that exclude the communications function from the core duties of the frontline, programme staffers.

This mismatch of intent and practice poses several challenges to INGO Communication. On the one hand, the Communications Managers are expected to use their professional and technical competencies to facilitate the production of promotional and advocacy materials for the INGOs by programme/project workers. In principle, the approach taken by Action Aid and Christian Aid is meant to centre the voices and perspectives of those on the frontline of development work. These workers, however, are not trained communication professionals and are not employed with this output as a primary expectation. Therefore, they perceive their engagement with the training conducted by the Communications Managers and their willingness to engage in the production of communication material as secondary obligations, to be fulfilled if and when they have time away from their core job demands. The result is that the production of communications material is side-lined and treated as marginal in the organisations' daily operations.

However, promotional and advocacy materials are critical components of INGO operations. They enable fundraising and help INGOs to gain legitimacy among their publics. Despite this mismatch of expectations, the organisations' offices in the West (where the bulk of fundraising is conducted) continually demand stories, videos and photos from field offices such as those in Kenya and Uganda. To meet this demand, communications staffers rely on the personal, informal relationships they build with their programme implementation colleagues, working with those they identify as willing or able to provide such material and engage them to help in the production of communication materials.

This arrangement is problematic, as it can lead to unbalanced communication of INGO work with some programmes being given more prominence than others based largely on their implementer's relationship with the communications team. Programmes that are successful in implementing their objectives but with which communications workers have no personal, informal relationships or for which no communications materials are requested by Western offices could easily have little or no visibility, their success notwithstanding.

Finally, findings from interviews with communications staffers reveal that they tend to have more agenda-setting influence (about what to cover) than power over narrative framing (how to cover it). Changes within the industry have meant that many INGOs are now moving towards ceding authority to field offices as well as involving them more in their global governance and decision-making processes. Organisations like Action Aid, Christian Aid and World Vision have made significant progress in decentralising their global governance structures with their regional and national offices now having some form of representation on global governing boards or secretariats. Action Aid has even shifted its global headquarters to South Africa.

Using a moral economy approach has allowed for a nuanced analysis of INGO communication. It has shown that on the one hand, INGOs' fundraising model remains unchanged, while on the other, their messaging is increasingly making claims of local representation and participation. It also helps to explain this apparent contradiction. With the bulk of their funding coming from Western and some Asian countries, the promotional activities of advocacy, public engagement and marketing remain firmly controlled in the West. Because the communications functions in these INGOs' field offices are often seen as being in place to respond to promotional needs, decisions about how development activity is communicated end up being made by the Western offices. In this respect and despite their stated intentions, INGOs continue to prioritise their promotional and fundraising needs over problematising and de-essentialising communication of their work in Africa.

The point here is not to fault the INGOs or engage in a binary discussion of the merits and demerits of INGO communication in its current form. Rather, I discuss and explain why INGO communication in these five organisations is the way it is. I do this by examining the structural, political, institutional and personal aspects of their communication material production processes. It reveals a complex web of advances, tensions, collaborations, negotiations and pushbacks in INGO Communication processes. It demonstrates on the one hand, the significant agency locally-based communications staffers in these organisations have and, on the other hand, the limitations they face and why.

In the next chapter, I engage more intimately with the roles played by these locally-based communications staffers in the challenge and perpetuation of Africa's media image as well as the legitimating logic they employ when doing so .

7 Churnalism, Brown Envelopes and Afro-Pessimism: INGO Communication from an African Perspective

7.1 Introduction

INGOs have long been considered as ambassadors of the poor or Southern communities in which they work to Western audiences from whom they derive most of their funding (Rubenstein, 2015; Dogra, 2012; Sambrook, 2011). Also, much like foreign correspondents, they "shape the way audiences see events, and in what vocabulary these events are talked about as they have the prerogative of interpretation of these events" (Von Naso, 2018:86).

However, a lot of this reputation – and by extension, the claim of Afro-pessimism in INGO communication – has been built based on analysing data from INGOs' global Western offices, Western media, or a combination of both (see Hellmann, 2020; Douglas, 2019; Nothias, 2015; Rubenstein, 2015; Yanacopulos, 2015a; Ossewaarde et al., 2008; Madon, 1999). As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, such approaches have the (unintended) consequence of projecting INGOs as homogeneous in the sense that INGOs' head offices are presented as being representative of entire organisations without much regard to nuance and differences in approach among national offices. The media also often reports on INGOs as a monolith such that the distinction between, for example, Save the Children UK and Save the Children's programmes in Kenya (supported by several Save the Children offices) is seldom made or acknowledged (Scurlock et al., 2020).

Furthermore, because much of the INGO or media literature reviewed and many of the employees interviewed tend to be Westerners or based in Western offices, conclusions about INGO communication tend to conceptualise it as a practice engaged in (almost exclusively) by Western actors. But Southern national offices of INGOs regularly engage in communication and many of them have entire departments of professionally trained communications professionals. Moreover, many of the stories, photos and or videos communicated in the West by INGOs originate in the Global South, with communication personnel in places like Uganda and Kenya contributing to their production either directly (generating stories about the organisations' work and taking the photos/videos themselves) or indirectly (by coordinating with and assisting staff members and contractors commissioned by Western offices). What exactly these staff members contribute to INGO Communications and how these contributions fit into or challenge Afro-pessimism are under-researched areas.

As the previous chapter shows, many INGOs like World Vision, Save the Children, Action Aid and Christian Aid have made several changes in their governance structures, giving national offices more agency than previously. However, how this agency translates into real-life situations and the daily practices of locally-based communications workers remains unknown. The result is that generalised, anecdotal assertions and assumptions are made about INGO communication, largely without evidence outside of material published in or by the Western offices of these organisations or interviewees with Western/West-based employees.

Such assumptions have been called out as problematic, most notably by Scott (2015), who warns that the lack of enough empirical evidence to back up claims of Afro-pessimism has led to several unsubstantiated yet unquestioned myths about the representation of Africa. This contributes to the "common sense of humanitarianism" that Tester (2010:34) refers to (discussed in section 2.4.1).

This chapter contributes to the growing efforts by scholars to demystify INGO communication in two ways. First, I explain how communications workers who work for national offices of INGOs in Africa interact with local journalists to get their organisations' work reported in local press. Two primary cases form the heart of this chapter. The first is an analysis of the interactions between one INGO's office in East Africa and journalists invited to cover the handover ceremony of maternal health kits and refurbishment of a government-run health centre. The second is the Ugandan media's interaction with and reporting of Save the Children's End of Childhood Report in 2018. The two cases have been selected because they demonstrate the inner workings and thinking of INGO communications workers while interacting with the media on the one hand and how the media responded on the other. Crucially, they demonstrate how the practice of 'brown envelopes' – payment of journalists by the INGOs – is interpreted and justified by the communications workers as necessary and even essential to achieving their promotional and advocacy goals.

Secondly, I establish the moral economies involved in these and other such interactions between INGO communications staffers and journalists. I demonstrate that just like their Western counterparts, African INGO communications staffers and journalists engage in "mutual, agentive renegotiation of multiple, value-laden obligations" (Wright, 2018:118). I further argue that in doing so, they illustrate a central assertion of this thesis – that Afro-pessimistic narratives are not the preserve of Western media and are instead better understood as emanating from attempts at extraversion by both the media and INGOs.

7.2 An INGO's Interaction with Local Media in Uganda: A Case of Brown Envelopes

Sam[14] works as a Communications Officer for one of the INGOs included in this research (hereafter referred to as INGO A). The organisation arranged for an official handover ceremony of maternal health kits to a government-run health centre. The event was largely organised by Sam's colleagues in the Programme Implementation division, but the communications department was charged with ensuring widespread publicity, media coverage by all major national news outlets, and appropriate branding. They were also expected to independently

[14] Pseudonyms are used for all participants mentioned in this section. This section combines data from my observation notes with follow-up open-ended interviews held with participants.

record the event for purposes of institutional memory and internal donor reporting and accountability.

The Communications Manager tasked Sam with engaging the media for coverage of the event. This involved reaching out to 16 local media organisations. These included newspapers (*The New Vision*, *The Daily Monitor*, *The Observer*, *Bukedde*), television stations (Nation Television, Nile Broadcasting Services, Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, Bukedde TV, Salt TV) and several radio stations (K-FM, Sanyu FM, Capital FM, Radio One FM, Central Broadcasting Services, Radio Simba, Galaxy FM).

The 16 were chosen from the organisation's media list of over 125 news organisations operating in different parts of the country that was compiled over the past decade and continues to be regularly updated. For each of the media organisations, a list of contact people and their designation was drawn up. Sam explained that some of these media organisations' operations are limited to specific regions of the country, or their broadcasts are in languages spoken in certain areas and not others. Because this event was held in the capital, Kampala, only media that broadcast or published nationally in English, and those that had Luganda news bulletins (the language widely spoken across the country), were invited.

> What we want is maximum reach for any event or programme we are conducting. If the event is national in nature, we focus on media organisations with national reach. However, if we are commissioning something like a borehole or safe water source in a particular district, we focus on having local media covering the event. (Sam)

Under each of the 16 news outlets selected for this event are the contact details of the news editor to whom an invitation was sent: their title, email, and mobile telephone number(s). In the next column is the name of the journalist(s) assigned to the event by the editors and their contact details.

This meticulous records of media contacts pointed to two realities worth noting about INGO communication in Global South locations such as Uganda. First, it showed that INGOs' Southern offices are as invested in engaging and getting the attention of local media as their Western counterparts are in international media. This particularly resonates with previous research findings by Von Naso (2018) showing that INGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa highly prioritise and nurture their relationships with the media. Sam's catalogue of media contacts was arranged such that he not only knew who to call for what event, but also so that he could maintain communication with them on a regular basis.

Secondly, the way Sam went about choosing which journalists to invite was indicative of an uneven power distribution between INGO A and journalists. The community health centre that had been renovated was a public, government-owned entity. The upgraded maternity services were a matter of public interest, and it could be argued that any media organisations that wanted to attend or cover the event should have had access and that the decision about who should or should not attend should have rested with the government. Yet, given that it was INGO A that had donated equipment and refurbished the health centre, the government ceded the responsibility for media coverage to them. This finding is similar to Von Naso's, who found that INGOs tend to have a monopoly over infrastructure, access and information, thereby having an upper hand in their relationship with the media since they are in a position to deny or "access, information or contacts, resulting in the journalists performing self-censorship in order to comply with the organisation's needs and requirements, even if these are not always explicitly declared" (Von Naso, 2018:213). In this case, information about the event as well as the renovation was exclusively in the control of INGO A, with Sam having almost absolute authority over who should access it.

On the day of observation, only ten of the 16 editors contacted had journalists assigned to the event. Sam reached out to the telephone on his desk and began to call each of the news outlets, beginning with those that had not confirmed their attendance.

> These guys are funny. You can send them an invitation to a function and they keep quiet, and then when you go to the venue, you find them there. And of course, because you sent out the invitation, you cannot tell them to go away or that you had not prepared for them. On the other hand, some of them confirm and then at the last minute, their editor decides to send someone else or no one at all because a bigger story has come up. Or the editor completely forgets about you. (Sam)

And so, he called them again on the morning of the event to reconfirm with those that had responded and to get any last-minute confirmations from those that had not. The Minister of Health would be attending this particular event, so Sam was fairly confident that it would get significant coverage in the news.

> With such events, we try to get high ranking members of government to be present. Most times, that's not hard because the work we are doing impacts greatly on their constituents, but it is also the kind of thing that will get media attention. Those two are usually enough [incentives] for them to come. (Sam)

Having previously worked as a journalist himself, he has a good sense of the media logic involved in determining whether or how to cover any given event – it was precisely because of this expertise that he was given a job as a communications officer. The advertisement for the role stated that the organisation required someone that had "excellent communication and public relations skills" and previous experience with media relations (Appendix VII).

As he works the telephone, his colleague Esther enters the office with news about the branded material. The pull-up and tear-drop banners have been loaded onto the truck, as have the brochures detailing the organisation's various projects in maternal health, child nutrition and community resilience. All of these materials were printed months ago and are generic, used by the organisation at almost all its public or networking events.

Esther settles down at her own desk, opens her laptop and begins to make last minute tweaks to the National Director's speech. This too, is something that the communications department does very often. The driver of the truck containing the branding materials comes in to find out if there are any other materials to load. Esther points to a stack of branded folders in the corner of the room, asking him to pick 100 of them. At the venue, a copy of the function's agenda, the National Director's speech, factsheet of the organisation's involvement with the health centre as well as the brochures will be stuffed into each folder and handed to the guests and media. Copies of this information are also emailed to the journalists invited to the event, even those that did not come. Sam explains that this is just another way of ensuring that journalist have all the information they need to run a story about the event.

> You've got to make it as easy as possible for them to write the story. In fact, sometimes we basically write the story for them and all they do is tweak it a little bit and add their names on the by-line. (Sam)

There is no hint of sarcasm or scorn in his voice. From his perspective, giving journalists this information and allowing them to publish huge chunks of it – unedited and as news stories written by the journalist – does not pose any moral challenges.

> The information there is factual. If we include figures, we ensure that they are accurate statistics. Remember we have subject matter experts. Also, if the journalist wants to expand on the information we give them or has questions about them, we are always open to providing further details. (Sam)

Previous research has posited that INGOs are more likely to receive media coverage when the issues they work on or advocate for are legitimised by government officials (Kothari, 2018; Lang, 2012) or when there is an absence of government action (Meyer et al., 2018). On the other hand, Powers (2018:56) argues that humanitarian INGOs today tend to have more clout and legitimacy both with the media and general public and as such, tend to "decentre government officials as the primary authority on certain news topics". In East Africa, researchers have often pointed to what they describe as lazy journalism – the media's uncritical republishing of material from press releases as news – as a mainstay in news production (McIntyre and Cohen, 2021; Obuya and Ong'ondo, 2019). On the other hand, suppliers of news material, such as PR agencies and INGOs have become very news savvy and tend to provide ready-to-use content to journalists as a form of information subsidy. Pejoratively dubbed 'churnalism' by Davies (2011), it is becoming a growing area of interest in media studies, as discussed in section 4.4.1.

In this case, all three factors played a role in influencing the way Sam interacted with the journalists. The knowledge that a senior government official would be present at the event translated into Sam not following up with the media as aggressively as he would in cases where no government official was in attendance. This was demonstrated in how he was confirming attendance on the day of the event rather than several days prior. As he himself later intimated, events that solely involve INGO A were much harder to publicise and media coverage was often unpredictable. Even coverage of events organised by several INGOs, such as celebrations of the Day of the African Child – which would ideally be newsworthy – depend more on these organisations paying for media space and coverage than unpaid-for editorial content. In a demonstration of the information subsidy paradigm proposed decades ago by Berkowitz and Adams (1990), INGOs, politicians, and the press collaborate synergistically in a complex web of co-dependence that at once echoes and challenges each of the three concepts discussed above (the primacy of government in legitimising INGOs, INGOs decentring governments as primary authorities, and churnalism).

> The only way you can guarantee free media coverage of such an event is if you have the president or line minister present. At that point, the media will be interested in covering government's position on various matters and then seek our opinion. Otherwise, every other kind of publicity, whether appearing on a live talk show or having a statement printed in the press, we pay. (Sam)

However, Sam also expressed a belief that INGOs are increasingly seen as the go-to sources by journalists. This is especially true about stories around humanitarian and development programmes.

> If there's a landslide for instance and people are displaced, we [INGOs involved in humanitarian emergency responses] become the most reliable sources for the media because we are the ones doing the footwork. Of course, government officials are also sought for comment, but any serious journalist or media house will come to us to get an idea of what is happening on the ground. (Sam)

He also noted that journalists sometimes publish their (INGO A's) press briefings or releases almost word-for-word as news items. However, he disagreed that this was necessarily down to lazy journalism. From his perspective, many of these statements are very well written, with very little to add. He also pointed to how many media organisations in the country struggled to retain well trained journalists on a full-time basis and often relied on such INGO material to subsidise the costs they incurred in news production.

> People say it crosses a line, but how exactly? I am a former journalist. I know what a news story should look like and I can put one together. If I do so and the news editor looks at it and determines all the facts are in there, where is the problem? The only thing I think would be wrong is to maybe publish the article in its entirety and then claim it was written by the journalist. But even then, I don't need the credit and the journalist needs the money… If I am a reader or consumer of the information, my major concern is whether the information provided is true or not. (Sam)

Sam's stance on INGOs' influence on the news production process is not surprising, given that pervious research has shown that most INGO communications staffers tend to be former or trained journalists (Kothari, 2018; Scott et al., 2018; Powers, 2017; Wright, 2015; Franks, 2013; Fenton, 2010; Zuckerman, 2010; Abbott, 2009; Cooper, 2009). This professional and social connection between many INGO communicators and journalists results in two scenarios that are relevant to this research. First, because of the camaraderie between the INGO communication workers and journalists as well as the professional history of the former, their interactions are not always as straightforward as their job descriptions. When Sam calls a journalist at a media organisation he previously worked with, he is not merely interacting with them as an INGO communications worker but also as an ex-journalist and former colleague. When he pitches a story or sends through a targeted story, the editor receives it not merely as a form of information subsidy (Jackson and Moloney, 2016:769), but also as a story written by a trained journalist. It is in this context that editorial subsidies as discussed in section 4.4.1 must be understood. It is not simply that the stories pitched are tailored, page-ready and coming from sources that have a strong understanding of what news is and how newsrooms work, but journalists and INGO communications workers are often connected in a complex web of professional, personal and social alliances.

Secondly, because of the blurred lines of interaction, journalism ethics such as objectivity, which has traditionally been understood to mean that reporters "be accurate and fair, and to deliver the news with as little bias as possible" (Ward, 1999:1), also become blurred. Similarly, most researchers and media practitioners agree that the principle of editorial independence is a critical component of journalism (Vine, 2017; Strömbäck, 2011; Schlesinger, 1990). However, Sam perceives himself to be on the same side as his former colleagues in the media, or at least capable of producing a story that meets the journalistic standards of being factual and balanced. Because of this, he does not feel that a journalist publishing a media release he produced as a news item necessarily infringes upon the principle of editorial independence.

Moreover, Sam would not be expected to pay for the press release to be published as a news item and an editor independently reads it and determines it to be sufficiently written as one. From a journalistic perspective, the release would be an important information subsidy, enabling editors to publish a journalistically written, relevant news story without having to incur the cost of hiring or paying a (freelance) journalist. As Sam is a former journalist, he felt he was in position to produce the same kind of journalistic stories a freelance journalist would.

> I know a lot of freelance journalists whose costs of travelling and producing a story are paid by the organisation they are covering. We [INGO A] even sometimes commission such journalists to cover events we organise. These guys are not employees of the media house they pitch the story to and of course because they have been facilitated by the commissioning organisation, they have an interest in having the story published because that reflects well on them and guarantees future gigs. (Sam)

Making sense of the ethical logic employed by journalists and INGO communications workers requires an adoption of what Clifford (2005:136) refers to as "moral discernment", that is, going beyond the facts to assess, evaluate and make distinctions that clarify "which actions promote human fulfilment". Ultimately, this means employing moral economy theories since they deal with understanding the economic rationale(s) both journalists and INGO communications workers use to justify their actions.

The point here is that the payment of journalists by INGOs persists in part because both parties conceive it to be a logical, rational and appropriate way to mitigate the challenges they face. These challenges are twofold. For journalists, it is the inability to independently access and finance the production of a story that is of interest to the public while for INGO communication workers, it is the fulfilment of key advocacy and public engagement mandates. In so far as achieving the INGO advocacy mandate also fulfils the journalistic duty of informing the public, the two collaborate with significant assumption of goodwill. This in turn may lead to journalists uncritically adopting and reproducing information received from INGOs.

While Sam and INGO A adopted this interaction with the media as the most effective way of achieving their goals, in this instance it was not immediately apparent that any success had been achieved. In the week following INGO A's event, none of the organisations invited to cover the event engaged in the repurposing of the information contained in the press pack as news items. Reflecting on this reality, Sam noted that even with the most elaborate and sophisticated media relations strategies, success was not always guaranteed.

This was particularly true for media organisations with a national reach, in part because they generally tend to be more financially secure and able to independently facilitate their journalists but also because their reach means that there is more competition for the limited editorial space available. INGOs therefore find themselves having to compete not just among themselves for coverage in these national media organisations' coverage of development news but also with news from other sectors. In the Ugandan context for instance, New Vision Group and Nation Media Group – the owners of the two most widely distributed daily national newspapers as well as the most watched television stations – are some of the largest corporate entities in the country (Semujju, 2018; Uganda Business News, 2016). As such, they can afford to foot their reporters' transportation costs and even have ethical codes prohibiting them from accepting money from news sources (Mwesige, 2010).

On the other hand, when engaging media organisations that had regional reach (that is, limited to a few districts or one language that was not nationally spoken), INGO A tended to have more success since there was less competition for editorial space and the financial incentives given to journalists significantly boosted journalists' very low pay. Likewise, INGO A was generally more successful with getting coverage from online media organisations. Sam opined that this may be because web-based media did not have limitations on space or time and therefore could easily reproduce information sent to them.

These findings and observations are consistent with previous research such as that of Jackson and Moloney (2016) who found that while public relations practitioners felt it was "now easier to get material published through local news outlets which have gone through some of the deepest newsroom cuts", national level outlets were harder to break through due to competition for limited space, even though "it is actually the case that [they] are taking more [page-ready material]" (Jackson and Moloney, 2016:771).

The next section looks at a successful pitching of such stories to national media organisations by Save the Children in Uganda.

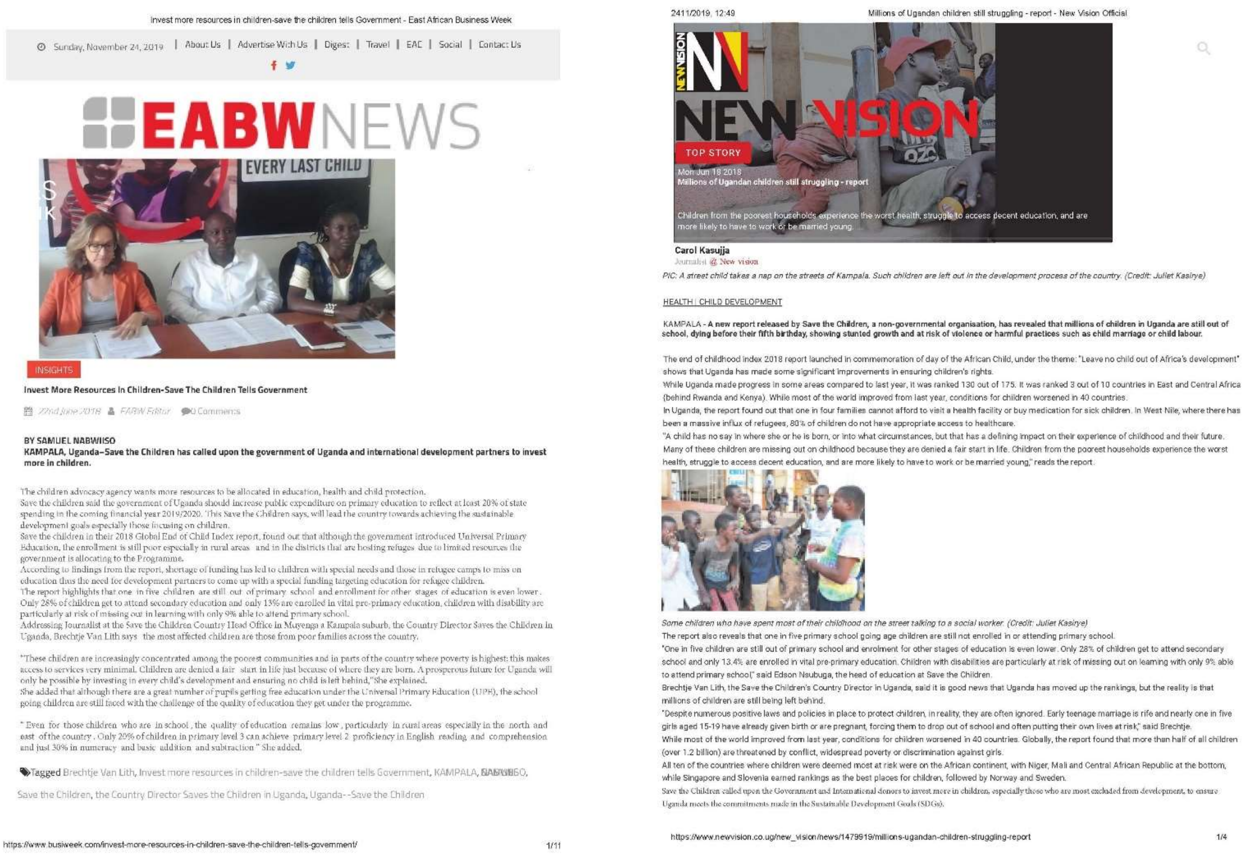
7.3 Save the Children and the East African Business Week: Churnalism or Collaboration?

This section analyses the ways in which Save the Children and journalists interacted and contributed to the production of news stories on a report commissioned by the INGO. The analysis combines information from semi-structured interviews with Save the Children staff, organisational records shown to me during or after the interviews, published newspaper stories as well as personal observations.

Since 2017, Save the Children has annually released a report titled *End of Childhood Report*. The report "assesses where the most and fewest children are missing out on childhood" (Save the Children, 2018:3). The report includes data from 175 countries and beyond, ranking them based on the risks children face, highlighting some of the crosscutting issues affecting children and recommending steps that their respective governments need to take to address them.

In Uganda, the 2017/2018 report was officially released at a press conference held at the Save the Children in Uganda head office in Muyenga, Kampala. The event was held on 15th June 2018 to ensure that newspaper coverage was published the next day – the Day of the African Child. In preparation for the event, the communications team prepared a press kit that included: a copy of the report, a copy of the data about Uganda, and a press statement about the report along with a brochure profiling the organisation and its work in Uganda. At the end of the press conference, the prepared remarks by Save the Children in Uganda's Country Director, Brechtje Van Lith, were also shared with the journalists present.

Following the press conference, two newspapers published stories about it: *The New Vision* and *The East African Business Week*.



Invest more resources in children-save the children tells Government - East African Business Week

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Invest More Resources In Children-Save The Children Tells Government

22nd June 2018 FARW Editor 0 Comments

BY SAMUEL NABWIISO
KAMPALA, Uganda–Save the Children has called upon the government of Uganda and international development partners to invest more in children.

The children advocacy agency wants more resources to be allocated in education, health and child protection.
Save the children said the government of Uganda should increase public expenditure on primary education to reflect at least 20% of state spending in the coming financial year 2019/2020. This Save the Children says, will lead the country towards achieving the sustainable development goals especially those focusing on children.
Save the children in their 2018 Global End of Child Index report, found out that although the government introduced Universal Primary Education, the enrollment is still poor especially in rural areas and in the districts that are hosting refuges due to limited resources the government is allocating to the Programme.
According to findings from the report, shortage of funding has led to children with special needs and those in refugee camps to miss on education thus the need for development partners to come up with a special funding targeting education for refugee children.
The report highlights that one in five children are still out of primary school and enrollment for other stages of education is even lower. Only 28% of children get to attend secondary education and only 13% are enrolled in vital pre-primary education, children with disability are particularly at risk of missing out in learning with only 9% able to attend primary school.
Addressing Journalist at the Save the Children Country Head Office in Muyenga a Kampala suburb, the Country Director Saves the Children in Uganda, Brechtje Van Lith says the most affected children are those from poor families across the country.

"These children are increasingly concentrated among the poorest communities and in parts of the country where poverty is highest: this makes access to services very minimal. Children are denied a fair start in life just because of where they are born. A prosperous future for Uganda will only be possible by investing in every child's development and ensuring no child is left behind,"She explained.
She added that although there are a great number of pupils getting free education under the Universal Primary Education (UPE), the school going children are still faced with the challenge of the quality of education they get under the programme.

" Even for those children who are in school, the quality of education remains low, particularly in rural areas especially in the north and east of the country. Only 20% of children in primary level 3 can achieve primary level 2 proficiency in English reading and comprehension and just 30% in numeracy and basic addition and subtraction " She added.

Tagged Brechtje Van Lith, Invest more resources in children-save the children tells Government, KAMPALA, NABWIISO, Save the Children, the Country Director Saves the Children in Uganda, Uganda--Save the Children

https://www.busiweek.com/invest-more-resources-in-children-save-the-children-tells-government/ 1/11

24/11/2019, 12:49 Millions of Ugandan children still struggling - report - New Vision Official

NEW VISION

TOP STORY

Mon Jun 18 2018
Millions of Ugandan children still struggling - report

Children from the poorest households experience the worst health, struggle to access decent education, and are more likely to have to work or be married young.

Carol Kasujja
Journalist @ New vision

PIC: A street child takes a nap on the streets of Kampala. Such children are left out in the development process of the country. (Credit: Juliet Kasirye)

HEALTH | CHILD DEVELOPMENT

KAMPALA - **A new report released by Save the Children, a non-governmental organisation, has revealed that millions of children in Uganda are still out of school, dying before their fifth birthday, showing stunted growth and at risk of violence or harmful practices such as child marriage or child labour.**

The end of childhood index 2018 report launched in commemoration of day of the African Child, under the theme: "Leave no child out of Africa's development" shows that Uganda has made some significant improvements in ensuring children's rights.
While Uganda made progress in some areas compared to last year, it was ranked 130 out of 175. It was ranked 3 out of 10 countries in East and Central Africa (behind Rwanda and Kenya). While most of the world improved from last year, conditions for children worsened in 40 countries.
In Uganda, the report found out that one in four families cannot afford to visit a health facility or buy medication for sick children. In West Nile, where there has been a massive influx of refugees, 80% of children do not have appropriate access to healthcare.
"A child has no say in where she or he is born, or into what circumstances, but that has a defining impact on their experience of childhood and their future. Many of these children are missing out on childhood because they are denied a fair start in life. Children from the poorest households experience the worst health, struggle to access decent education, and are more likely to have to work or be married young," reads the report.

Some children who have spent most of their childhood on the street talking to a social worker. (Credit: Juliet Kasirye)

The report also reveals that one in five primary school going age children are still not enrolled in or attending primary school.
"One in five children are still out of primary school and enrolment for other stages of education is even lower. Only 28% of children get to attend secondary school and only 13.4% are enrolled in vital pre-primary education. Children with disabilities are particularly at risk of missing out on learning with only 9% able to attend primary school," said Edson Nsubuga, the head of education at Save the Children.
Brechtje Van Lith, the Save the Children's Country Director in Uganda, said it is good news that Uganda has moved up the rankings, but the reality is that millions of children are still being left behind.
"Despite numerous positive laws and policies in place to protect children, in reality, they are often ignored. Early teenage marriage is rife and nearly one in five girls aged 15-19 have already given birth or are pregnant, forcing them to drop out of school and often putting their own lives at risk," said Brechtje.
While most of the world improved from last year, conditions for children worsened in 40 countries. Globally, the report found that more than half of all children (over 1.2 billion) are threatened by conflict, widespread poverty or discrimination against girls.
All ten of the countries where children were deemed most at risk were on the African continent, with Niger, Mali and Central African Republic at the bottom, while Singapore and Slovenia earned rankings as the best places for children, followed by Norway and Sweden.
Save the Children called upon the Government and International donors to invest more in children, especially those who are most excluded from development, to ensure Uganda meets the commitments made in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1479919/millions-ugandan-children-struggling-report 1/4

Figure 2: Screenshots of articles published by the East African Business Week and The New Vision

In analysing the stories published by both newspapers, two observations stand out. First, both articles relied entirely on the information provided by Save the Children to write the story. *The East African Business Week* reporter, Samuel Nabwiiso, relied on only two sources: the copy of the data about Uganda as well as the country director's remarks. *The New Vision's* Carol Kasujja included a quote from a third source, Edson Nsubuga, a programmes manager at Save the Children. Nsubuga was also present at the press conference and the remarks quoted were made in the pre-planned segment of the press conference. While there was a question-and-answer session, in which journalists were given the opportunity to seek clarity or further information about the report, no information from this segment of the press conference was included in either of the newspapers' stories.

Secondly, neither news story offered any critical examination of the report outside of the observations made by Save the Children's officials. This is particularly relevant as it would suggest that the journalists in question did not even independently interact with the report, relying instead on their sources' perspectives to write the story.

The journalists' exclusive reliance on material provided by Save the Children along with the observations made by the organisation's staff members demonstrate two relevant issues for this thesis. First, Sam's conceptualisation of himself as a journalism insider is strongly mirrored in the Ugandan media's perception of INGO press briefs. In other words, there is a moral economy that exists partly because of the mutual trust between journalists and INGO communications workers. It is this trust that facilitates journalists' uncritical reproduction of information given to them by INGOs as news stories. In this particular case, the journalists' trust extended not only to the contents of the report issued by Save the Children, but also to the organisation's interpretation of it.

Secondly, previous research (Powers, 2018; Wright, 2018; Abbott, 2015; Waisbord, 2011) has pointed to rapidly declining news production budgets as one of the reasons INGOs are playing an increasingly major role in news production, particularly of foreign news. This example demonstrates that even in situations where little or no financial investment is needed on the part of the media, there remains a strong reliance on and trust in INGOs by the media. Given that the press conference was held in Uganda's capital, Kampala, and within walking distance of both *The New Vision* and *The East African Business Week*, neither newspaper had to invest heavily in the sourcing of the story.

In any case, Save the Children provided journalists with transportation refunds to cover their costs of travel to and from the press conference. The journalists could have very easily sought perspectives from other sources such as government officials and/or other civil society organisations. That they chose to rely entirely on Save the Children's perspectives and data belies a level of uncritical trust of and respect for information from the Save the Children borne out of a longstanding interdependent relationship between the organisation and the media.

But mutual trust is not the only reason a moral economy exists between journalists and INGO communications workers. As the next section demonstrates, journalism and international development work, particularly advocacy communications, are interdependent fields that by their very nature demand or at least engender a mutual assumption of goodwill between INGOs and journalists.

7.4 The Moral Economy of Brown Envelopes in INGO Communications

Sam is now talking to one of the news editors that was yet to confirm his radio station's attendance: "But you know we cannot do that sir", he says, shaking his head and smiling, "I would be in a lot of trouble with my boss!" The editor on the other end of the line responds and for almost two minutes Sam listens, occasionally grunting to indicate he is still on the line. Eventually, a compromise seems to be reached. "Okay you give me the reporter's number and I talk to him", Sam says, before jotting down a telephone number, thanking the editor and hanging up. He then calls the reporter. "Big man", he starts before exchanging pleasantries with the journalist, "Ok now, [the news editor] says I should talk to you about our function today. You know how we do things here my brother. I am not allowed to give you transport. But don't worry, we shall work something out".

A negotiation ensues, in which Sam tries to convince the reporter to cover the event and the reporter tries to get Sam to commit to paying him some money. “Transport” or “facilitation” is code for money paid to journalists by organisations seeking media coverage. In Uganda, Kenya and several other African countries, it is common for journalists to expect organisations inviting them to cover functions to give them some money at the end of the event (Ireri, 2018).

Sam explains that since 2012, some of the leading news organisations in Uganda have explicitly forbidden their employees from receiving money from sources, imposing financial penalties on those who do and, in some cases, boycotting the organisations found to be paying their employees. Similarly, Sam’s employers have on several occasions publicly committed to not paying journalists. But the practice is still very common and editors often turn a blind eye to it. Sam puts it this way:

> The reality is most of these journalists are freelancers. That means they are paid per story published. So if you invite them to cover the story and they invest their own money in travelling, submit the story and the editor decides not to publish it, they are not paid. (Sam)

He explains that by inviting them without any form of compensation, one is effectively asking journalists to spend their already meagre earnings on a story they are not guaranteed will be published. “Of course they will not come”, he concludes.

He then explains that one of the ways round this challenge is to maintain a list of journalists that are from occasionally commissioned as consultants by the INGO to gather stories, photos or videos from the field. The journalist is paid as an independent consultant and, usually, the amount of money earned in a week’s worth of work may be more than double the journalist’s monthly salary or retainer (in the case of freelancers) from the media organisation they work with. This incentivises the journalist to cover the INGO’s other functions where a payment of the ‘facilitation’ may not be possible. The journalist Sam was talking to was one of those that the INGO occasionally contracted. By promising to “work something out”, Sam was insinuating that the journalist will in the future be offered such a consultancy. It seemed to be an agreeable bargain and the journalist confirmed his attendance.

Most literature about the payment of journalists for coverage of events, commonly known as brown envelope journalism, has taken one of two directions. On the one hand, some researchers have sought to demonstrate the ethical problems related with the practice, such as the compromising of journalistic independence (Onyebadi and Alajmi, 2021; Dirbaba, 2010; Kasoma, 2009) or the promotion of lazy journalism/churnalism as discussed Chapter 4.4.1 Lodamo and Skjerdal (2009) equate the practice to bribery, arguing that reasons given for its existence (by journalists and NGO workers alike) are primarily justifications rather than mere explanations of a sociocultural phenomenon.

On the other hand, there have been efforts to demonstrate that the practice, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, is embedded in a much larger culture of clientelism in which "media institutions tend to be concerned more with safeguarding their economic interests by ensuring that they do not publish anything that negatively impacts on relationships that grant them various economic favours" (Mabweazara et al., 2020:2160). Kothari (2018) moves this argument further, arguing that the postcolonial reality in Africa means that journalists are constantly caught between universal values such as unbiased or independent reporting and the need for financial assistance from news sources.

The key takeaway here is that in either case, previous research appears to take for granted the notion that brown envelope journalism is unethical and detrimental to or violates universal principles of journalistic ethics. Even when described as a "hybrid ethical frame" (Wasserman, 2010:83) in which journalists readily concede its unethical nature but justify engaging in it as an economic necessity (Kothari, 2015), the underlying assumption made is that it is unideal.

Skjerdal (2018) notes that framing it this way wrongly assumes congruity between the normative and descriptive aspects of brown envelope journalism:

> It is often taken for granted that journalists' engagement with brown envelopes reflects a compliant attitude towards informal gratifications among media professionals… Conflating professional practice with the journalists' normative attitude is insufficient because it habitually underestimates the practitioners' ethical deliberation and, worse, risks justifying a practice of which the journalists are generally critical. (Skjerdal, 2018:164)

Thus, it must not be assumed that when INGOs provide journalists with financial assistance that it necessarily results in them compromising their commitment to unbiased reporting. Indeed, as noted earlier, for all of Sam's efforts to get press coverage, none of the media organisations invited reproduced the information he gave them.

Instead, what is evident is a moral economy in which both journalists and INGO workers view brown envelopes as facilitating rather than impeding journalistic practice. From an INGO communications perspective, there is a story that needs to be told not simply for branding or promotional purposes, but for advocacy as well. This is especially true for INGO offices in places like Uganda and Kenya where publicity of the event in local newspapers is not usually aimed at fundraising. Because they are implementing offices, INGOs working there already have the funds needed to run their programmes and – as seen in the previous chapter – depend heavily on their offices in the developed countries to raise money. Organisations such as World Vision and BRAC are some of the biggest taxpayers in Uganda (Uganda Business News, 2016). Their expected return on investment is therefore often not necessarily about financial or positive media mentions but in the achievement of their advocacy and public engagement goals. A story focusing on the need to reduce maternal mortality, for instance, would be viewed as successful media engagement by Sam, even if INGO A was not mentioned in the story.

Moreover, the stories coproduced with national media are used in various ways by INGOs and not just as journalistic products. Because of their wide scope of duties and responsibilities, locally-based INGO communications workers often such stories for multiple audiences and uses. A story detailing success in one project could be published in local newspapers, the organisational website, the national office annual report as well as in communication to sponsors. In such cases, the INGO communications team would be in charge of editing it to provide the details, style or angle necessary for each of these platforms. As one respondent explained, "Sometimes you can tell the same story, but for different audiences, especially when the story is very compelling and has so many angles to it" (INGO Communications Staffer 12).

A case in point was with Plan International's anti Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) campaign. As part of their communications efforts, they interviewed both Maasai elders who were involved in the campaign as well as Maasai warriors. They also hired a famous Kenyan photographer, Armstrong Too to visually profile these community activists.

> The initial idea was that we do this as part of a national office initiative to engage audiences in Kenya and start a national conversation about FGM. But then because this was a project funded by our support office in Netherlands, we also needed to consider ways in which we the story would be used by them. And then of course the issue is not just practiced in Kenya, so we needed to think about how we would project the message to the international community. (Plan International Kenya Communications Staffer 3)

In the end, they had to adapt the same story for different audiences, reversioning it in each case. For the local audience, they held an arts exhibition in Nairobi at which the photos of the Maasai elders' and warriors' stories where highlighted.

> We wanted to have the communities at the forefront of this project. Because ultimately, unless you win over the leadership and members of the community in your advocacy, it will be very hard if not impossible to cause behavioural change. So the fact that elders of the Maasai, who were respected custodians of the community's traditions, were willing to publicly campaign against the practice was a big, big thing that needed to be front and centre of our planning. (Plan International Kenya Communications Staffer 3)

The exhibition lasted a week and the opening ceremony was graced by a wide spectrum of development workers, local politicians, ambassadors and the press. It got a lot of coverage in the local press where emphasis was put on the elders' role in fighting FGM.

Plan International Kenya also worked with the communications team in the UK to have the profiled leaders and their opinions published in *The Guardian* newspaper (Too, 2017). A similar story was posted on the organisation's website (Plan International, 2017) used in the country office's annual report and was widely distributed in marketing leaflets and newsletters by support offices in Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States.

> For each of these audiences, the story was tweaked a bit. For instance in the local media, because we have an ongoing relationship with most of them, the story was more about FGM in general and how we are supporting local leaders and activists in their efforts to bring it to an end. In The Guardian, there was a brief introduction that mentioned us and our work to end FGM so although Armstrong (Too) was credited in the publication, it was largely projected as our advocacy programme. Even on the website, we used it to showcase what we are doing in partnership with the local leaders and communities and because it was our platform, we had some leeway to get into a little more details about our anti FGM project…The communications team was the one behind all of this reangling and strategizing. This is what we do. (Plan International Kenya Communications Staffer 3)

A key point here is that the interviewee viewed the INGO communications team, rather than the journalists they worked with, as the ones doing the reversioning. Similar to findings by Wright (2016:1521), this instance of collaborating with local and international media involved Plan International carefully selecting the photographs and Masaai elders interviewed so that journalists can only tell the kind of predetermined story the INGO wanted told.

However, because getting legacy media to produce INGO material is an uphill task that- as section 7.2 showed- is often successful, the extent to which this successful attempt can be said to be representative of INGO Communication generally is limited or at least debatable. What isn't debateable is the intent. It shows that INGOs engage in highly sophisticated media engagement strategies aimed at appearing to be focused on advocacy goals while also achieving their promotional and brand recognition objectives. The effort invested in selecting the photos shared with *The Guardian* newspaper as well as which Masaai elders and warriors to interview also appears to be an editorial subsidy as defined by Jackson and Moloney (2016) and discussed in Chapter 4.4.1.

A study of NGOs' promotion of health reporting in Tanzania observed that this kind of media engagement "allows NGOs to work within the news production system, instead of relying on editorial agendas to influence media coverage" (Kothari, 2018:57). The study further argues that this buy-in into the news production system results in media coverage of NGO work and services, which is then used as evidence of the effectiveness of their work and justification for further funding from donors.

The findings of this research echo those captured by Kothari (2018) in two ways. First, Sam's explanation about the impact of government officials' presence at the handover ceremony is consistent with Kothari's observation that NGOs use the presence and participation of government officials at publicity events to secure media coverage. Secondly, the ethically questionable payment of journalists – referred to as transport facilitation or allowance – is justified as a necessary subsidy in the production and publication of information that satisfies both the journalistic goal of informing the public and the advocacy goals of the INGOs.

This claim of prioritising advocacy goals over promotional or branding goals was captured in one of the interviewee's descriptions of the organisation he led. John Kitui, the Country Director of Christian Aid Kenya described the organisation's role as "mainly about facilitating people to access health services, facilitating people to adapt to climate change and meet climate change issues and also to enable them to engage in markets". Viewed from this perspective, INGOs financially facilitating journalist's costs of collecting and producing development or humanitarian news can be better understood as an act of advocacy that not only achieves the advocacy goals of the organisation but also enables journalists to speak truth to power by highlighting areas that governments or government policy neglects. An example of this is the stories published by *The New Vision* and *The East African Business Week* about Save the Children's report, discussed earlier. The report showed how millions of children in Uganda were not attending school and recommended an increase in government spending in the sector in spite of the latter's often talked about free education programmes.

This research however goes further to explain the media engagement strategy as a form of extraversion. Dogra (2007) has argued that one of the primary roles of INGOs is to show the world as it should be. To do this, INGOs must engage with and influence the media, since they are the primary information source for the public. One way they do this is through enabling and facilitating journalists to cover humanitarian/development news. This, however, is often interpreted as brown envelope journalism and attracts debates concerning its ethicality.

Skjerdal (2010:370) has referred to brown envelope journalism as a sort of "informal contract" in which both the journalist paid and the INGO making the payment have expectations of each other that, although not formally assented to, are morally binding. The INGO feels obligated to facilitate the journalist's costs of production while the journalist feels obligated to ensure that the story is not only written but also published.

However, journalists do not have ultimate authority over whether or not a story is published. This duty belongs to editors, defined in part as individuals who "oversee newsgathering and dissemination" as well as act as arbiters of what constitutes journalism, thereby "legitimising journalism as a form of cultural production and a generalised social good" (Duffy, 2021:638). It is the power editors possess to assign reporters stories and then decide which of those stories gets to be published (and what angles of the story to explore, highlight or cut) that explains why INGO communication workers like Sam prioritise developing relationships with them. Indeed, the responsibility to nurture relationships with the media in order to achieve advocacy goals is a core requirement for INGO Communications Managers (see Appendix VII).[15]

However, since the financial assistance and information is given to the reporters/journalists, it is they who feel most obliged to get the story produced. It is this informal contract that forms yet another layer of the moral economy of story production between INGOs and journalists. Speaking to INGO communications workers, it is clear that they understand the precarious contexts most journalists in East Africa operate in. As ex journalists themselves, many not only empathise with their former colleagues, but view brown envelopes or transport facilitation as simply part and parcel of doing development.

> When I am going to the field to collect an impact story, the organisation covers my costs. When donors or potential donors are coming into the country, we facilitate their travel to our projects so that they see for themselves what we are doing. Of course, the hope is that they like it, but they are under no obligation to do so. Some of them come back very critical of what we are doing or have an experience that does not meet their expectations. For me, I do not see how facilitating journalists to cover our work differs from such. (INGO Communications Staffer in Kenya)

This interviewee demonstrates a different understanding of brown envelopes than Skjerdal (2018:163), who argues that "the practice is so entrenched that local NGOs in some societies believe it is part and parcel of professional journalism and that it is impossible to get media coverage if a subsidy is not offered to the reporter". Instead, the interviewee argues for a reframing of the giving of brown envelopes as a key ingredient in development journalism. They also point out how sometimes INGOs do not even get mentioned in the news stories as proof that it is not primarily about publicity.

[15] Appendix VII is a job advert for a Communications Manager for Plan International Kenya that requires, among other things, that the job holder "Establish, strengthen and maintain strategic partnership with media and public relations partners in order to boost Plan International's public image, profile and visibility in the country".

But as the Save the Children case demonstrated, brown envelope journalism can very easily lead to the uncritical reproduction of INGO material as news items. By combining the provision of journalistically written material to reporters with facilitating them to cover events, INGOs blur the lines between their position as news sources and their direct investment into the news production process. Whether this is intentional or coincidental, this blurring of lines negatively impacts on journalists' claims of independence and the legitimacy of INGOs' claims of being purely interested in advocacy.

However, beyond the ethical problems brown envelope journalism raises, it is important to understand the moral economy involved in the practice. An examination of the practice would be incomplete without appreciating the underlying assumption of goodwill by both parties. In engaging with each other, INGOs and journalists "become partially dis-embedded from their own organisations, and partially re-embedded in new exchange-relations with each other which cut across journalism and NGO-work" (Wright, 2018:119).

While these new exchange-relations are facilitated by the financial assistance offered to journalists by INGOs, they are concerned with normative issues, values and practices that both parties care deeply about. Speaking truth to power and providing the public with accurate, relevant, timely and impactful information are all core news values (Parks, 2019; Bednarek and Caple, 2017; Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). In accepting the facilitation INGOs provide, journalists are able to fulfil these core objectives of their work.

On the other hand, INGOs fulfil their advocacy and public engagement objectives as their work and the contexts in which it is done are highlighted by the media. Because they are not the only sources available to journalists and do not condition their financial assistance on a guarantee from journalists that the stories covered will be published, INGO Communications staffers do not view brown envelopes as compromising the media's independence.

In the next section, I turn to the narratives about Africa generated by this INGO-journalists relationship and demonstrate how it can be viewed as a form of extraversion.

7.5 INGO-Media Relations as a Form of Extraversion

In Chapter 2 (sections 2.1 and 2.7) I discussed the concept of extraversion, explaining it as what happens when groups or individuals in a dependent relationship find ways of exploiting it to gain some sort of agency, either in terms of resources (financial and human) or authority (Hagmann, 2016; Peiffer and Englebert, 2012; Bayart and Ellis, 2000).

The instances of INGO-media interactions discussed in this chapter thus far have shown an unequal relationship between the two, with each having more power than the other in different but connected ways. Although advocacy communications is a core part of what they are involved in, INGOs have limited editorial influence on what and how the media – particularly those with nationwide reach – get to cover in the humanitarian/international development sector. African journalists and media organisations, on the other hand, are often financially challenged and not always able to incur the costs involved in producing stories that are otherwise of public interest. Even when they can, as is the case for large media organisations such as *Vision Group* and *Nation Media Group*, they often have to depend on INGOs for access to information, sources and sites at which the newsworthy events are occurring. I argue that by collaborating in the ways described in this section, INGOs and the media engage in highly sophisticated extraversion strategies, with either party gaining agency and power in an otherwise unequal relationship.

INGOs' limited control of the media agenda means that they will maximise every opportunity to engage the media and highlight their advocacy goals. However, by virtue of international development's focus on issues such as poverty, injustice and social exclusion, the most opportune moments to engage with the media happen to be at times of humanitarian crises, on recognised advocacy days (such as World AIDS Day or International Women's Day) or other such events/moments. In the cases discussed, the high incidences of maternal deaths in Uganda made INGO A's renovation of a maternity hospital ward newsworthy, while Save the Children's report was released to coincide with the Day of the African Child. This afforded the INGOs the rare opportunity to influence the media's editorial content.

Similarly for the media/journalists, these advocacy moments and issues provided them with an opportunity to report on issues they would ordinarily have no access to or – if they did – lacked the financial capacity to adequately report on. Faced with the economic challenges of news production and an opportunity for information as well as editorial subsidies, journalists used the INGOs' financial strength to achieve their professional and personal goals of informing the public and earning some money. For either party, therefore, their interactions and collaboration could be interpreted as forms of extraversion.

These findings are similar to previous work by Wright (2015) and Kothari (2018) who both found that journalists justify their acceptance of brown envelopes as a way of fulfilling their personal and professional responsibilities while downplaying the extent of influence the INGOs paying this money have on their independence. But the effect of these relationships is not simply an amalgamation of extraversion efforts on the part of INGOs and journalists. It also perpetuates Afro-pessimistic narratives within the media in two ways. First, because the journalists and INGO communications workers engage each other in a collegial manner as coproducers of news, neither party is sufficiently independent of the subjects being reported on to be able to effectively push back on generalised, simplistic or racialised narratives emerging from the reporting.

Douglas (2019:37) has pointed out that part of the reason Afro-pessimism has emerged is because the combination of development and journalism "has become the permissible dominant framing for international news on Sub-Saharan Africa". Like Kalcsics (2011), she argues that far from being constrained by a media logic, resource-rich INGOs manipulate the increasingly resource-poor media in the West to produce narratives about their work in Africa aimed primarily at resource mobilisation. Because of both this dominant framing of international news and the promotional goals that drive INGOs' engagements with the media, she concludes that "we must question what histories are informing these relations, and why mainstream news stories about Sub-Saharan Africa are frequently fitted into a development/humanitarian frame" (Douglas, 2019:42).

By focusing on the ways INGOs interact with African, national media, I depart from most of the available research that has focused mainly on INGO-media narratives about Africa aimed at Western audiences (see for instance Sakue-Collins, 2020; Anyangwe, 2016; Bunce, 2016; Dogra, 2012; Harth, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2010; Musila, 2008; Ojo, 2002; Lidchi, 1993; Jarosz, 1992). As the previous sections demonstrate, even in countries like Uganda and Kenya, INGOs hold significant sway over the ways in which news gets produced and reported. In other words, local African media are as engaged in the production of INGO-led narratives about the continent as their international partners. The interdependent relationships identified between international journalists and aid workers are shown to exist between East African journalists reporting for national and regional newspapers and INGO communications workers. I therefore argue that INGO-media relations are better understood within the context of attempts at extraversion, with each party taking an agentive rather than passive part in the reproduction and mainstreaming of development narratives about Africa.

The relationship is symbiotic rather than merely exploitative on the part of INGOs. While the media enjoy information and editorial subsidies, INGOs gain the position of 'authorised knowers' – authoritative, informed and legitimate service providers and campaigners on development issues (Fenton, 2010:155).

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided empirical data on the interactions between INGOs and the media. Through a combination of participant observation and interviews, I have demonstrated that INGOs use sophisticated media relations techniques in an attempt to influence media and to achieve their advocacy and promotional goals. Because of the established camaraderie between journalists and INGO communications staffers – owing in part to the latter's experience as the former – I demonstrate that the extent to which INGOs can influence the media is negotiated, with varying degrees of success despite constant investment into media relations.

Moreover, because national-level INGO communications staffers perceive their media interaction and influence efforts to be aimed more at advocacy and public engagement than fundraising, this research finds that the fundraising intent identified by pervious researchers such as Kalcsics (2011:7), Douglas (2019), and Wright (2018) is not as apparent in INGO communications efforts in East Africa. I argue that this could be partially explained because the INGO offices in Sub-Saharan Africa mostly implement already financed programmes.

Similarly, I argue that the media use INGOs' significant financial capacity and control of information to meet their professional and personal obligations. The result is a mutually beneficial relationship between the two in which the media enjoy information and editorial subsidies while INGOs grow and/or maintain their status as major and legitimate authorities and sources of development news.

This symbiotic relationship, I argue, results in INGO communications workers and journalists treating each other as colleagues or coproducers of news, thereby not only blurring the lines between the two but also severely curtailing either's ability to critique stories produced within the context of their relationship. Two assertions result from this. First, I argue that brown envelope journalism is best understood within the context of the moral economies involved in the interaction between INGOs communications workers and the media. In other words, the often-cited ethical challenges emanating from journalists' collaboration with and trust of INGOs are in practice secondary considerations, if they are considered at all. Secondly, both INGOs and journalists consider this relationship to be a form of extraversion with either party being able to achieve key responsibilities in ways they would otherwise not be able to. These observations contribute to what Wahutu (2018a:61) referred to as "a more nuanced conversation on the representation of Africa", not just in the media but also by INGOs. In the next chapter, I discuss the ways in which INGO communications workers understand, engage with and either justify or challenge Afro-pessimism.

8 INGO Communication and Afro-Pessimism

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 established the structural layout of the five INGOs in this study, discussing the historical challenges resulting from them and analysing the extent to which current structural reform efforts address these challenges. In Chapter 7, I discussed the interactions between locally-based INGO communications workers with national media and reflected on the nature and impact of these interactions on both the news production process and the narratives they produce. In this chapter, I turn inwards to discuss the ways in which locally-based INGO communications workers understand their work to interact with and influence Africa's media image. In other words, their understanding of Afro-pessimism in the media and the extent to which they contribute to it, through the work they produce and how they produce it.

This introspection is important for several reasons. First, it reveals the extent to which these INGO communications employees are conscious of Africa's negative media image. This then leads to the question of whether they view Afro-pessimism in the media as (partially) a result of the work they produce. If they do, then knowing what they do – or do not do – to counter this negative image will shed new light on their story production processes, providing nuance to research in international development and communications studies. It would for instance reveal instances of self-censorship within INGO communication, a phenomenon that has hitherto tended to be applied mainly to journalists' story production processes when collaborating with or dependent on INGOs (Von Naso, 2018; Wright, 2014; Lodamo and Skjerdal, 2009; Shake, 2008). If, on the other hand, they do not feel that their work impacts on Africa's global media image, then this too has far-reaching implications. First, it brings into question the extent of reflexivity in INGO communication work. Given the moral claims INGOs make about the positive impact of their work and the significant amount of money they invest in monitoring, evaluation and learning (Mbithi, 2020; O'Leary, 2017), I argue that such a stance would be untenable, but it would partially explain the persistence of these negative media narratives about the continent despite all the research and calls for reform that have gone on for decades. They cannot be expected to correct a problem that they do not think exists.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first engages with interviewees' ideas of Afro-pessimism. This includes their definition of the term, its characteristics and whether it exists in Western media narratives of Africa. I particularly engage with the media logic they employ in reflecting on Africa's global media image and how elements they identify as Afro-pessimism align with or differ from the five characteristics proposed by Nothias (2012), de B'béri and Louw (2011) and Hellmann (2020), as discussed in section 2.4. I also consider the concept of racialised market rationality as defined by Douglas (2019) and how it applies to INGO communication efforts. Combining the empirical data collected with reflections from my own experiences as a communications professional, I argue that Afro-pessimism is often used as a tool of extraversion by locally-based staffers who find themselves severely limited by the INGOs' racialised market rationality.

In the second section, I focus the discussion on the ways in which Afro-pessimism plays out in INGO communication practice and structure. I demonstrate that prioritising the fundraising and advocacy needs of INGOs' Western offices results in the production of simplistic narratives of Africa that emphasise its difference from the West by centring Western perspectives and othering African ones. I explore the workers' perceptions of their direct/official and indirect/unofficial roles within their organisations. I argue that the execution of these roles as they perceive them breeds a sense of duty and loyalty to the organisations they work for which ultimately translates into putting the organisation's interests ahead of any sense of duty towards the continent's image. To demonstrate this, I discuss the expression of Afro-pessimism in INGO story production processes and structures.

Lastly, I examine the gender dynamics inherent in INGO communications both in terms of narratives as well as employee demographics. Because women and the gender-related issues they face form a significant part of INGO agendas, I analyse the ways in which gender affects and is affected by the story production processes in the five organisations and identify some of the opportunities and challenges women face in the sub-sector.

I conclude by arguing that while INGO communications workers are cognisant of the negative effect their narratives have on Africa's media image, organisational dynamics and their self-perception enable them to rationalise, justify and excuse Afro-pessimism in their work as a necessary contribution to an unequal relationship between the West and Africa; in other words, as a tool of extraversion.

8.2 Does Afro-pessimism Exist? Perspectives of INGO Communications Staffers

From my own experience as a communications worker with several INGOs, I know that many professionals in the sector are not only conscious of but constantly debating the impact of their stories on the audiences they reach. Discussions about assignments given or stories, photos or footage captured from beneficiary communities very often included debates about how to demonstrate need without compromising the beneficiaries' dignity. In many instances, internal branding and communications guidelines listed the kinds of images that were never to be used. For instance, photos and videos of naked children or those that exposed breastfeeding mothers' breasts were very often discarded without any protest. Written stories on the other hand were more contested and the process of determining 'what goes' was far more subjective. A story that vividly described emaciated children and the dire needs of a community hit by famine for instance could be rejected by one Western office editor as too "graphic" and accepted by another as "moving". Even within the national offices I worked with, opinions on such stories differed. During my initial interactions with the interviewees however, it became clear that although they were aware of some attributes of Afro-pessimism, the term itself was not familiar, as I discuss below.

8.2.1 Afro-pessimism Equated to Western Gaze on Africa

Before the start of each interview, particularly after introducing myself and walking interviewees through my research objectives as listed in the Participant Information Form,[16] I asked them if they were familiar with the term 'Afro-pessimism'. With the exception of one participant – an ex-communications staffer at regional level who had since started working as a consultant and part-time lecturer of communications – all responded in the negative. In each case, I proceeded to provide the following description of the term as per section 2.2: 'Afro-pessimism is a concept that generally deals with the representation of Africa in simplistic, racialised and pessimistic terms with the overall picture painted being that it is backward or incapable of solving its problems without external intervention'.

I specifically avoided introducing the term as relating to the continent's media image or as being about the West's conceptualisation of the continent. However, all the INGO communications staffers I interviewed across all five INGOs not only agreed that Afro-pessimism existed, but also specifically pointed to Western media and INGO messaging as bearing responsible for it. One respondent described it this way:

> Africa has a very negative image in the West. Many people there think we are a place of hopelessness, with people running around naked and hungry or killing each other for sport. (INGO Communications Staffer 12)

[16] See Appendix III, section 2.

This was echoed by another participant, who noted that much of the continent's media image was extremely simplistic, emanating from the decontextualization of humanitarian crises happening in various parts of Africa.

> When you watch the news, especially international news, you can think that everyone in Africa is suffering and dying. And I think that narrative ends up being everything the West knows about Africa. (INGO Communications Staffer 13)

A third interviewee introduced the idea of INGOs being involved in perpetuating this image, but still appeared to focus on the media coverage of aid work. They pointed out that INGOs had been in Africa for over half a century with growing budgets and programmes. This, they reasoned, was probably one of the reasons that Western audiences were not too optimistic about the continent's agency or future.

> I think when they consider all the charity work going on across the continent and the fact that it is them funding it, they think to themselves, "surely nothing good can ever come out of Africa unless we help them". (INGO Communications Staffer 10)

In all these cases, their understanding of Afro-pessimism related to Africa's media image and the West's conception of the continent. This resonates with the "anarchic hellholes" Western media narrative described by Hellmann (2020:331) and discussed in section 2.4.1. Inversely, during the introduction and discussion of the term, none of the interviewees thought of African media, institutions, politicians or individuals as major contributors to Afro-pessimism.

This unanimous perception of the existence and nature of Afro-pessimism is not surprising. Between 2013, when I was last a full-time INGO communications staffer, and 2018, when I conducted my field work, the aid sector has become more conscious of and responsive to issues surrounding media narratives about the Global South. As discussed in section 3.6, this sensitivity is part of the reason Oxfam and Action Aid moved their global secretariates to Nairobi and Johannesburg respectively.

Moreover, my fieldwork was conducted in Uganda and Kenya, which were the sites of global debates about Western narratives of Africa in the wake of the Kony 2012 campaign and #SomeoneTellCNN (Adeiza and Howard, 2016; Bex and Craps, 2016; Nyabola, 2016; Von Engelhardt and Jansz, 2014; Nothias, 2013; Basu, 2012). The interviewees therefore were aware of global debates on Afro-pessimism, even if the term itself was not used when describing them. This reflected some level of post-colonial reflexivity within the aid sector, much like that observed among journalists by Nothias (2020) and discussed in section 2.3.1. In particular, interviewees demonstrated a willingness to not only accept but also to engage with the idea that Western media is pivotal in perpetuating stereotypical representations of the continent.

Relatedly, while Afro-pessimism was universally acknowledged, there were varying, sometimes conflicting reasons advanced for its existence. The three most cited reasons were the media and the nature of news (mentioned by 22 participants), INGO communication goals (18), and uneven editorial power between the Global North and South (17). Other reasons given included laxity on the part of South-based communications professionals, racism/racialised concepts of development and white supremacy as a legacy of colonialism (3), religion (2), and education systems and syllabi in both Africa and the West (1).

Two observations are noteworthy from these responses. First, only a handful of participants (3) linked Afro-pessimism directly to racialisation and the legacy of colonialism. This is in stark contrast to post-colonial scholars such as Nigerian Nobel Prize Laurette Chinua Achebe who noted that "Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray – a carrier on to whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate" (Achebe, 1977:19). Others have been more forward, describing Afro-pessimism as "a racialised phenomenon" (Evans, 2011:399) and the result of "racialized power relations rooted in entangled histories and imperial imaginations of expansionist projects" (Deridder et al., 2020:25).

The second observation is that only a minority of participants (7) linked Afro-pessimism to the kind of work they did, that is, to locally-based INGO communications workers. Unlike in Nothias' study, which found that foreign correspondents engaged in post-colonial reflexivity, this research finding suggests that many locally-based INGO communications workers do not feel that their work directly contributes to the perpetuation of Afro-pessimism. They appeared to equate Afro-pessimism to Western media perspectives and coverage of the continent. This is consistent with my analysis of academic literature on Afro-pessimism (discussed in section 2.2) whereby Afro-pessimism is often understood to be the product of a Western gaze, perpetuated by Western media (Schorr, 2011b).

The tendency among interviewees not to directly connect colonialism and its racialised discontents to Afro-pessimistic narratives can be explained by several factors. The first is that they felt that in implicating the 'Western' or 'international' media, they had sufficiently signposted me to the racial aspect of these negative narratives. During my interactions with them, the term 'Western' was frequently and consistently used interchangeably to not only mean Europe and the United States, but also White or Caucasian. This perspective was not unique to the interviewees and can also be seen in scholarship about Afro-pessimism explored in this thesis (Hellmann, 2020; Nwachukwu and Ogundiwin, 2020; Nothias, 2015; Evans, 2011; Schorr, 2011b; De Beer, 2010; Rieff, 1998).

However, as will be seen later, INGO communications workers also tend to be very careful about the way they represent Western audiences and entities. Apart from the obvious reason that they work for Western INGOs, they are also constantly courting and dependent on Western donors. Portraying Western audiences as racist or their fundraising models as racialised potentially creates a reputational (and therefore fundraising) risk for the INGOs they work for.

Similarly, while 22 interviewees identified INGOs as contributing to Afro-pessimism, most of them felt it was not necessarily because the INGOs were at fault in some way, but that it was merely an unavoidable consequence of the kind of work they did. This tendency to downplay their organisations' responsibility while highlighting that of the media is not unique to INGO communicators. Researchers have for decades pointed to various media biases as an explanation for the dominance or subjugation of certain narratives (Arango-Kure et al., 2014). Dunham (2013), for instance, argued that certain media attached ideological labels to certain sources and not others, thereby projecting the former as less objective than the latter. More recent studies such as that of Ribeiro et al. (2018) have applied this concept of ideological labels to news outlets on social media, demonstrating a correlation between the political leanings of social media users and the news they end up receiving in their social media newsfeeds.

When applied to this research, ideological labelling translates into INGO communication professionals projecting themselves as objective while casting the media as pursuing specific, biased narratives. This was particularly evident when they were asked how they felt about the idea that international media perpetuated Afro-pessimism.

> The reality is bad news sells. And this is particularly true about Africa in Europe and America. If the BBC or CNN are to talk about anything positive coming from Africa, it will either be buried in the middle of news segments or specialised programmes like *Inside Africa* or something of the sort. But if it is war, famine, or other humanitarian crises, then that fits Africa's billing and will go right up to the top of the news bulletin. I think part of it is to do with their expectation of what should come out of Africa, but another is just the nature of news. (INGO Communications Staffer 18)

The interviewee here, as was the case with most of the others, appeared to turn a blind eye to how INGOs are some of the major contributors to news about war, famine and other humanitarian crises. Moreover, scholars such as Franks (2013) and Powers (2018) have demonstrated that as far back as the 1985 Ethiopian famine, INGOs were key players in media representations of Africa, with Oxfam being responsible for facilitating the now infamous Michael Buerk broadcast on the BBC discussed in section 4.2.3.

The argument here is not that the media are unimportant players in the perpetuation of Afro-pessimism, but that participants appeared unable or unwilling to reflect on the aid sector's culpability. Instead, most entirely blamed Western media, even while acknowledging that said media relied on the information and images INGOs supplied or made accessible. This tendency is not new. Commenting on the West's apparent lack of interest in African affairs 15 years ago, a development worker with Save the Children remarked as follows:

> I have the sense that when I watch the media in the Middle East with all its limitations I get some detailed analysis, the people talking to camera know something about the region… whereas Africa gets rather slight coverage, it is intermittent without permanent representation and internationally Africa is not taken seriously. It is like the old joke, if somebody towed Africa off into the Atlantic and sank it, nobody in Europe would notice for a week. It has no great trading connotations, it has no armies, it has no political effect. (John Seaman in Franks, 2005)

Seaman's sentiments were echoed by one the interviewees, a former INGO Communications Manager that had previously worked with two of the five organisations in this study:

> Organisations like Save the Children or World Vision regularly release statements about poverty in places like the US and UK just like they do here. However, the reality is that in those Western countries, these reports [by INGOs] are treated like one of many other sources for policy formulation. There will also be jobs reports, polls and other data from various sectors to inform the public and not just the development sector. In our [Uganda and Kenya] case, INGOs are the only sources of such information. And if these

> organisations say something, it carries a lot more weight. (Former INGO Communications Manager)

As was the case with other interviewees, the former Communications Manager acknowledged the existence of Afro-pessimistic narratives but did not view INGOs as the primary instigators. Unlike the other participants who blamed the media, however, he provided a unique perspective focused on the power dynamics at play on the continent.

This argument is not without merit. Nowhere else in the world do aid agencies hold as much political, social and economic power as in Africa. Von Naso (2018) has observed that up to 25 per cent of money spent by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2013 went to Africa. Another scholar also noted that INGOs' financial muscle has meant that they not only dominate the civil society spaces in East Africa but also weaken other players by attracting "the more capable and resourceful staff members, particularly those with an education" from government and other public institutions (Holmén, 2019:523). This effect is arguably more by default than design. Nevertheless, in their attempt to bolster local capacity and positively impact on communities deemed to be in need, INGOs' presence in developing countries disempowers grassroots civil society actors and even local and national governments, given their financial strength, relative legitimacy among Western governments and wide institutional and individual donor networks. In turn, these factors further INGOs' standing as primary, authoritative sources of news for the media.

But while it is true that this dominant position occupied by INGOs is more by default than design, their communications staffers cannot be said to be uninvolved. INGO communication is in part intended to increase these organisations' influence and power in places like Uganda and Kenya. If, as the interviewee observed, INGOs hold more sway on the narratives about African countries than they do on the West, this would in part be a result of successful promotional initiatives by the communications departments. Also, as observed, communication efforts in all five organisations tend to highlight the negative, undesirable aspects of people's conditions, such as poverty, abuse, insecurity and injustice. As seen in the previous chapter, most of these efforts are aimed at fundraising and advocacy. Even stories of successful interventions highlight a need for more donor support alongside hope and impact. This emphasis on need and difference from Western countries means that Western audiences are constantly made aware of what Africa lacks and very rarely of the positives it has. INGO communication logic, therefore, aligns itself with that of the media in its coverage of Africa in simplistic terms.

Another participant pointed to the limited amount of time and space news broadcasts and productions have as an impediment to nuanced coverage and, therefore, perpetuation of stereotypes about the continent.

> If a newspaper has a limit of 30 or 40 pages in which to write everything they want to report on, of course they are not going to talk about everything and everyone in great detail. They must prioritise. The same thing with television or radio stations. You have an hour to present the news. That is one hour to give your audience an update of what is going on around the world. How can you expect a news editor in the UK or US to prioritise the opening of a new multi-million factory in Uganda over the death of hundreds due to famine in the same place? (INGO Communications Staffer 11)

The interviewee further argued that limited time amidst competing news stories and agendas meant that Western news editors inevitably had no choice but to cover Africa in general, simplistic terms.

> How do you expect an editor of these Western media to sanction a story about Uganda that goes into details of which district an event occurred in or the local dynamics? Of what value would that be to their audiences? If most of them don't even know where Africa is, why would they care which district in Uganda is affected by famine and which one isn't? And by the way, the same is true of African media reporting about Europe or America. They talk about events having happened in 'America' or 'Britain' without necessarily going into

> the details of where exactly they occurred. So back to the Africa narrative, in the end, you will have a very generalised story about war going on in 'Africa' or even 'East Africa'. It's just the way things are when it comes to news. (INGO Communications Staffer 11)

This response echoes previous justifications given by foreign correspondents for their coverage of Africa. For instance, Nothias (2016b) reported that they argue that their job is to deliver what the audience wants and they are not responsible for the ways in which their reporting is interpreted or Africa's media image. Wrong (2016) also rationalises foreign correspondents' tendency to use generalisations when reporting on Africa because of the limited space and tight editorial deadlines.

Both the foreign correspondents and these INGO communications staffers argue that Africa simply finds itself a victim of circumstances that are of no person's or entity's doing. However, as Brookes (1995:487) noted, there is a strong historical correspondence between the ways in which Western travellers, missionaries, anthropologists, biologists and colonialists essentialised Africa and modern day Western news narratives. It has also been pointed out that when it comes to coverage of Africa, "there is an overwhelming need for more depth and understanding in much of the way that we report news about Africa, enabling audiences to move beyond the rigid stereotypes" (Franks, 2010:82).

This need is not only for purposes of improving Africa's media image. With the arrival of social media platforms and the decentralisation of news sources, legacy media is increasingly having to compete with bloggers, social media influencers and other such sources of news that were previously at the bottom of the hierarchy (Kümpel et al., 2015). As one of the interviewees noted, social media allows for instant and direct communication by individuals to the rest of the world. Therefore, news obtained from there is often seen by users as authentic (Cooper, 2021; Von Naso, 2018; Nyabola, 2016; Kalcsics, 2011). This means that legacy media, particularly in the West, are now having their narratives about Africa challenged directly by affected communities. As has been pointed out recently by African scholars:

> Social media presents a huge opportunity for activists in Africa to engage global audiences online without huge resource commitments. Social media's relative low cost and openness compared to broadcast and print makes it a ready tool for people-powered campaigns. (Adeiza and Howard, 2016:220).

A clear example of this, discussed in Chapter 2, is CNN's reportage on Kenya that described the country as a "hotbed of terror" (Nyabola, 2016). In response, Kenyans took to Twitter to protest this characterisation of their country, under the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN, resulting in a threat by the Kenyan government to pull out of an advertising deal with the news channel and an apology from its Vice President. This, Nyabola argued, was "exemplary of the creation of an African-driven counter-narrative" (Nyabola, 2016:114).

To avoid such clashes, grow their audiences and maintain their legitimacy long term, several (13) of the interviewees agreed that Western media need to find new approaches to covering Africa that provide more context and scope. A participant from Action Aid argued that even when covering negative stories, Western media could – and should – provide more context, to enable audiences to understand that what is being reported is not representative of the entire continent.

> I understand that sometimes, for different audiences the amount of detail in a story will vary. Because if you say for instance that Kamau lives in Kilifi and fetches water 20km from his village, audiences in East Africa may appreciate these details because they know where Kilifi is or live in similar contexts and can relate. For an American or British audience, merely mentioning the 20km without naming the village would suffice. But that's only if your intention is to inform. Since journalists are also charged with the responsibility to educate, I think adding the name of the village and perhaps a line or two about how some other parts of the village have water sources nearby will paint a more balanced picture and help in correcting some stereotypes. So for me, when it comes to media coverage of Africa, I think providing the person or the community's background is

important because it's only until I understand that, that I will be able to even appreciate whatever it is the story is about. (Naomi Senda, Action Aid)

This argument appears to be nuanced and considered, demonstrating a level of reflexivity on the part of INGOs. However, given that INGO communications workers too are involved in story production, it was striking that Senda only seemed to be making this recommendation to the media alone. This is even more curious when one considers that INGOs have more leeway to produce contextualised stories for their audiences than news organisations which are often dealing with multiple and cross-cutting news items, with humanitarian stories being only one of them.

Two conclusions can be made here. First, that INGO communications workers are news savvy, with a deep understanding of the media logic employed by journalists. They not only know what makes a news story but also how that story is produced or edited. As discussed in Chapter 7, this is often a result of not only significant previous experience as journalists themselves but also of continuous interaction and coproduction of stories with journalists.

Secondly, given this close relationship with journalists, blaming the media for perpetuating Afro-pessimism without acknowledging the part they play in developing or supplying these stories appears to be a self-justificatory strategy employed by the INGO communications workers I interviewed. Given their unique position as 'authorised knowers' of Africa in the West (discussed in section 7.5) and close relationship with the media, it is not enough for them to point at news stories published in the media and pass the buck on to them. Indeed previous research has noted that even when presented with the tools and technology to bypass news norms and media logic, INGOs tend to use the said technology, such as social media, to pursue the attention of mainstream media rather than communicate directly with supporters (Powers, 2018). As discussed in section 2.3.3, due to reinforced path dependencies, INGOs tend to maintain their media engagement strategies even when challenges such as the perpetuation of

Afro-pessimism are noted. This echoes previous findings such as those of Lang (2012), who also notes that INGOs tend to act in ways that reinforce rather than challenge institutionally desired forms. In other words, INGO communication workers contribute to the perpetuation of Afro-pessimism through a combination of acts of commission, such as actively adopting a media logic that disadvantages nuanced reporting about Africa, and by acts of omission, which include an unwillingness to challenge such logic. In the next section, I discuss three ways in which the INGOs included in the study perpetuated Afro-pessimism in their communication efforts. I also engage with the moral considerations these INGOs consider to communicate the way they do about Africa.

8.2.2 Afro-pessimism as an Imbalance of Agency

For a significant number of interviewees (18), the rigidity of these media stereotypes of Africa is not only visible in the unchanging Western media narratives of an Africa in despair but also in the development sector agenda that profits from such stories. They argue that INGO communication largely targets donor audiences in the West and, as such, is naturally biased towards narratives of need. An independent communications consultant who has worked with several of the INGOs in this study put it this way:

> Whether it's for influence or income or whatever, the office in which the fundraising is happening has already worked out their seasons. They will say, "This season we are raising funds for the hunger crisis, this one is for conflict and this season is for a health campaign". And so as a field communicator, you find that if I knew that is the arrangement, if I came up with a story that doesn't fit any of these campaigns, I am not doing the job expected of me and will have to find another user for it. So in trying to find that balance between where to put it and going after a story that falls within an existing plan and framework etc., I will find myself writing stories that fit predetermined narratives. And for me, that is where the challenge arises. It is like you can get the stories, but that won't matter if they do not fit the mould. (INGO Communications Consultant 1)

To demonstrate how this plays out, the participant referred to a development in World Vision where they had previously worked and had some historical knowledge of:

> There was a time when the field communicators were churning stories at World Vision – they had shared internal portals called News Vision and Scribe. Communicators would go out and write stories based on their initiative, their respective field office operations and what they felt were the stories worth telling. They would write many stories because they were measured by the number of stories they did and the photos that they took. But later, when the databases were evaluated, they found that very little of that content was being used by the support offices for whom the material was being produced. Why? Because it wasn't meeting the needs of those offices. And that is when a new system was created called Share. With Share, a communicator pitches a story to support offices before they write it. If it gets a buy-in from any of the support offices, you now go and start producing the story knowing that there's going to be an audience; someone is going to use it. (INGO Communications Consultant 1)

While this system provided a sense of agency to the field office communications staffers, it also kept the focus on the support office communication needs. And because the primary role of these support offices is to raise funds and awareness of the organisation's work in Africa, the stories produced are much more likely to highlight need and perpetuate the Afro-pessimistic narratives that have dominated Africa's media image in the West than challenge them.

What this story production process also demonstrates is that to the extent that there is a clash between personal initiatives or local agendas and those of Western offices, the latter is likely to prevail over the former. Another participant who had worked for World Vision put it this way:

> There's no communicator who wants to keep producing materials that nobody is using. So once [the support offices in the West] describe the target audience, their interests, their needs – say they are interested in profiling needy children and women – if you're going to do the job, you take it with the terms and conditions of the job. If you are dissatisfied with the conditions and continue to work, either you will get frustrated and leave or you will do a bad job and get sacked. (Former Senior World Vision Communications Manager)

Another interviewee pointed out that the stories they collected from the field were only raw material for the marketing and fundraising teams in Europe and America. Therefore, even if the story were to be more nuanced in its characterisation of Africa, there was no guarantee that this nuance would be maintained in the final piece.

> Most stories that [INGO] marketers in the West use have been generated by communicators, but they end up in adverts that are decontextualized. The final ad has a powerful line by a mother or child, but it is a line pulled out of a 300-word story. The story had context, but this one line won't carry it. Or it's one photo being selected from maybe 200 photos. A series of photos tell a story but when you pull one out of that stack, there's a certain level of context that you are missing out on. And for me that is a big one: that the communicator produces and another person is in charge of how it is finally going to be packaged for the needs of a given audience. (INGO Communications Staffer 12)

From this perspective, locally-based INGO communicators' influence and agency is very limited. And yet, even if it was not, their agency would not necessarily translate into a challenge of Afro-pessimistic narratives in INGO communication. While the personal intentions and motivations of locally-based INGO communicators may differ from those of the organisations they work for, the image painted of Africa is very much the same: an Africa in need of saving by the West.

Positionality is therefore not as important a determinant of the ways in which Africa is projected than I initially thought. It determines whose voices are amplified or silenced and may provide insight into why communications employees of INGOs write the way they do. However, because of their limited control over what the message to Western audiences is, locally-based communications workers, regardless of gender or seniority, have very little agency in narrative building.

Indeed, from my personal experience working in the development sector, I felt a sense of duty to communicate and highlight the gender inequalities that existed in the communities where I worked as well as the challenges women and children had to overcome. However, many of the stories I produced reinforced, or at least did not contest, media narratives about the continent. The strong focus on children and women for instance reinforced what Dogra (2012) refers to as the infantilisation and feminisation of Africa (discussed in Chapter 3.5) among Western audiences while at the same time projecting African men either as absent from the development process or perpetrators of the injustices or inequalities faced by women and children. In other words, even though the intention was to highlight the challenges women and children face, the combination of Africa's colonial history and problematic media image mean that such stories (unintentionally) reinforce existing Afro-pessimistic narratives. Similarly, in this study, I found that while there were instances of individual agency, they were too limited in scope to challenge Afro-pessimistic narratives and were constrained by organisational promotional goals set mostly by Western offices.

8.2.2.1 Racialized Market Rationality in INGO Communication

The World Vision story production process discussed in the previous section demonstrates just how entrenched the top-down editorial hierarchy is, with field-based communications workers doing the bidding of their Western counterparts. There are a few opportunities for locally-based employees to negotiate their assignments; at the point of pitching a story for example, they have substantial freedom to choose which kind of stories they want to pitch to support offices, where they will go to get the story, and who they will interview for it. Even after the story idea has been adopted by a support office, there is usually a process of negotiation in which both offices agree on the timelines, specific deliverables and who to involve. However, all these opportunities for agency on the part of locally-based staffers are within the context of a system that prioritises the needs of the (Western) donors.

This finding echoes previous scholarship by Douglas (2019) who argued against racialised market rationality. Building on the concept of racial capital by Leong (2012:2190), Douglas defines racialized market rationality as the process by which white institutions such as Western media exploit the economic and social value derived from a black individual's racial identity for the benefit and perpetuation of Western-centric narratives (Douglas, 2019:135). Applying the concept to both journalism and INGO communication, she explains that because decisions about the way Africans are represented to Western media are determined mainly by economic interests (what kind of news paid Western subscribers or donors want to receive), a vicious cycle of Afro-pessimistic narratives is maintained.

Moreover, while INGOs continue to cater to the needs of their donors, they exploit the racial capital of their African, locally-based communications staffers in two main ways. First, as nationals of the countries and communities they work in, local communications workers easily communicate with the beneficiaries and document the organisations' work for Western audiences, thus enhancing INGOs' legitimacy in the eyes of both the beneficiaries and benefactors. At the local level, the INGOs are seen in a positive light for hiring locals and being truly 'international'. To their Western audiences, INGOs 'display' their African employees as the originators of these narratives, projecting the charities as both authoritative and inclusive. Authoritative because their stories are presented by and seen to be representative of people on the ground and inclusive because they hire said employees.

These employees often have little say in determining the story production process or agenda. One of the interviewees, a Communications Officer with World Vision, put it this way:

> My experience in this organisation has been that it's more of a top-down relationship. They request what they need for their audiences. We have tried several times to write stories and say, "for us, we think this is what's making impact". But what often happens is that they will say, "okay, thank you very much for putting it up, we'll get back to you". On a few occasions, they'll get back to you and say, "okay, generate it by this date and give it to us". But most of the resources that we give them are requested from them to us. Support offices deciding what they want us to generate makes sense because they know the audiences they

> work for and they know what appeals to the audiences that they work with. (World Vision Communications Staffer 4)

This response reaffirms the power structures discussed in Chapter 7 in which the rich Global North calls the tune and the poor Global South dances to it. It further highlights the third of four premises of Afro-pessimism as advanced by de B'béri and Louw (2011) and discussed in Chapter 2: the narrative that Africa is in trouble but can be fixed.

The notion that the West knows best – and that stories from the field offices must feed into the marketing and fundraising needs of the support offices – was widely shared across the five INGOs. In 2017 for instance, there was widespread drought in Kenya. To support the organisation's fundraising efforts, the European offices of Plan International constantly contacted their Kenya office to feed information to the international press.

> There are instances when the IH [international headquarters] got in touch with us because they wanted someone to comment about the drought. Last year [2017] we had a lot of response in terms of drought and so part of what they were trying to do in terms of fundraising was to keep having a lot of international media interest. It had been declared a national disaster here in Kenya, so that in itself made it newsworthy. And so, when our colleagues in Britain or America were contacted by the press there with questions about the organisation's activities in Kenya or East Africa, they would then contact us to be able to comment about it… Of course, they would give us the talking points they wanted emphasized because they are the ones that know what narratives best work for their target audiences. Our role is to provide the material to back up their campaigns so that they raise the money we need. (INGO Communications Staffer 19)

The staffer went on to say that this was a collaborative process in which they worked with the support offices in a collegial partnership: "We are all working towards the same goal". However, it was clear that the goal was whatever the fundraising offices said it was, not the other way round.

This perspective reveals a combination of racialised market rationality and a form of extraversion. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 7, extraversion refers to the exploitation and appropriation of resources or authority by an otherwise dependent party in an unequal relationship (Peiffer and Englebert, 2012). In this case, the Plan International Kenya office made the most of a relationship in which they had very little say about what stories to tell and how to tell them. Instead, they focused on delivering the talking points outlined by their colleagues in the UK and USA, knowing that although they reinforced stereotypes of Africa – many of which do not apply to Kenya – it would result in significant funding. It is important to recognise the limited but potent agency employed in this instance as it reveals an aspect of Afro-pessimism – one in which Africans are intentional, active participants in the narrative creation – that is often neglected or overlooked in discussions about the subject.

But the perpetuation of stereotypical narratives about Africa through racialised market rationality also negatively impacts international development in other indirect ways. As one of the interviewees noted, part of the problem with INGO communications is that it tends to compartmentalise development issues in ways that are not only simplistic but that also limit locally-based staffers' ability to provide the context that is much needed in combatting Afro-pessimism.

> Part of the challenge is with the models of development and funding models. In many cases, donors tend to separate projects into themes. Health is looked at as separate from agriculture, sanitation is looked at as separate from gender issues and so on. And yet we are talking about development. These issues are interlinked or connected. If there is a problem with producing food, then maybe the kids are getting emasculated or malnourished, then it becomes a health issue. If it becomes a health issue and goes on for a very long time, their parents' income is going to be affected. A mother who used to go farming is now saying, "Oh, I am looking after this child". A father who was employed somewhere now must look after this child. It's now becoming an economic problem. In the end, you find that it is not just one thing. And yet the funding models are such that you are expected to cover each sector independently because that's what the donors gave you money for. At which point do you look at these as interlinked issues that are all working together to affect that family? And so my feeling is that those operations, funding and

> whatever models tend to dictate the communication strategies, approaches and models as well. (Former World Vision Communications Staffer)

By limiting impact and advocacy stories to funding classifications, INGO communications ends up restricting itself to simplistic, depoliticised and stereotypical narratives. And while this may translate into stories that satisfy donor reporting requirements, it does little to effectively communicate the full breadth and nuance of the issues being dealt with.

These stories feed into official narratives of development by INGOs and their funders, who are often portrayed as "experts" and "voices of authority on particular geographic areas or themes" (Wright, 2018:37). The media's coverage of Africa and development – featuring these INGOs as expert sources – ends up being fraught with these inaccurate, simplistic depoliticised narratives, thereby further mainstreaming Afro-pessimism.

This observation by Former World Vision Communications Staffer 1 also demonstrates that the fundamentals of INGO communication have hardly changed over the past three decades. As Brookes (1995) observed 27 years ago, Western media tended to privilege Western interpretations of issues in Africa as the default, normative and expert view while simultaneously undermining, patronising or altogether ignoring African perspectives – unless they reinforced those of Western sources such as INGOs.

> The systematic thematic foregrounding of Western participants positions them as central and legitimate players in Africa. It contributes to the naturalization of the West's role in Africa as leader, mediator, bringer of peace and democracy and giver of aid as inevitable common sense… The frequent thematic position of state and guerrilla armies, numbers of deaths and nominalizations involving violence and peace foregrounds the supposedly pervasive violent nature of Africa and Africans. (Brookes, 1995:480)

More recently, Von Naso (2018) noted that INGO perspectives are very often prioritised and foregrounded by journalists while statements from humanitarian agencies such as the UN are often published or used without verification because they are seen as authorities.

When viewed within the context of INGO interests and their stature in the West as trusted authorities on Africa, the interviewees' blaming of the media for Afro-pessimism appears to be an insufficient explanation. This is especially so given how closely INGO communications workers relate to and coproduce development and humanitarian stories with journalists, as discussed in the Chapter 7.

In the next section, I discuss the various ways in which the interviewees perceived themselves as either lacking or having agency in the story production process and how these perceptions impacted the ways in which they engaged with their colleagues in Western offices.

8.3 Self-Perception and Agency

Staff members' perceptions of their role in an organisation very often affect not just their productivity but also how they go about their work (Dogra, 2012). For communications workers employed by INGOs, their understanding of their role can have far-reaching impact on the stories they choose to produce, how they produce them and, ultimately, what the West gets to learn about INGOs' work in Africa. Like foreign correspondents, locally-based communications workers in INGOs are "mediating agents" (Nothias, 2016b:74), linking Western audiences to the work being done by INGOs in Africa and painting for them the picture that ultimately justifies or highlights the fundraising, advocacy or marketing demands of the INGOs.

For locally-based employees, the influence and agency they have in an organisation tends to be measured in three main ways: first, the extent to which their work is used in promotion, advocacy or reporting by the INGO – whether locally by the field office or internationally by the support office. Secondly, the number of assignments they are entrusted with relative to their colleagues. This is particularly true with INGOs that have communication departments consisting of a team of three or more staff members. Lastly, because increased impact tends to lead to more responsibility, promotion in rank is seen to be largely an indicator of a communication worker's impact within the organisation.

In analysing interviewees' answers to questions about what they see their role in the organisation as being, there was a strong, direct correlation between the seniority of their role in the organisation and the amount of agency they exercised in their work. Out of 25 interviewees, 20 felt that communications played a key role in their organisation's work. Seventeen of those who felt that they played an important role in the organisation also felt that they had the ability to influence which stories got told by their organisations. On the other hand, the five interviewees who did not feel that their roles were consequential also expressed doubt that they had any influence on their organisations' narratives about Africa. None of these five included a manager or senior communications person.

However, employees' agency in choosing which stories get told rarely leads to challenging of Afro-pessimism. In many cases, agency was used to highlight beneficiaries' needs and the employing organisation's response to these needs. A case in point is a World Vision Uganda story highlighting the organisation's work with refugees in Bidibidi refugee camp. The story is titled "Their very first meal" and from the very beginning, evokes the imagery and descriptions long associated with Afro-pessimism.

> They waddle feebly into the verification room, haggard and pale, longing for something to put into their stomachs. Their eyes are drowsy, feet all covered in dust. For the last seven days, 27-year-old Maneno Rose has been on the road, trekking helplessly with her 3 little children from South Sudan.
>
> Jonas Ladu 10, Joel Anduga 9, and Betty Poni 3 are all frozen with hunger as they approach the World Vision desk to receive two packs of high energy biscuits each. This will be the family's very first meal in Uganda. (Mukitale, 2018)

The story and accompanying photos were produced by Moses Mukitale, whose job as communications coordinator for World Vision's refugee response meant that he had significant influence on which stories got told by the organisation. Also, unlike stories commissioned by support offices that tend to provide specific guidelines as to what is needed, this story was sourced as a personal initiative and posted on the world vision website by the country office communications department. Therefore, both the story's content and its publication were controlled by the organisation's Uganda office.

Despite this amount of agency, the story's content does not depart from the organisation's general advocacy themes of foregrounding need and highlighting the work being done to meet the need. It highlights the refugees' extreme hunger and the organisation's provision of meals with very little context about the extent and nature of the conflict causing this need. The family are projected as being helpless victims and the organisation as their saving grace. World Food Programme – the organisation producing the biscuits – is mentioned briefly and in passing as a partner. The story is therefore aimed primarily at promoting World Vision by highlighting the beneficiaries' need and the organisation's response to it. It demonstrates that more agency on the part of locally-based communications workers does not necessarily translate into less Afro-pessimism in INGO communications.

Here, previous work around Africans contributing to Afro-pessimism is uniquely applicable. Wahutu (2018b) for instance analysed the coverage of the Darfur conflict by Kenyan media and noted that many of the newspapers tended to privilege and reproduce narratives and frames of wire agencies, particularly Reuters. The, he argued, resulted in the "pushing to the periphery of African narratives about Darfur by African media fields" (Wahutu, 2018b:41). In other words, just because a story was published by African (Kenyan) media did not mean that it contained a local, Kenyan or African perspective.

In the case of Mukitale's story, even though the story was produced as a result of individual agency, it retained the organisation's framing and perspective and was written for the purpose of achieving World Vision's advocacy and promotional goals. This highlights the limitations of individual agency and provides a case for warning against hinging the localisation agenda discussed in Chapter 1 on the presumption that local agency will result in localisation. Indeed the cases discussed in this section show that very often, employees prioritise their roles as advocates for organisations they work for and their causes over any sense of responsibility towards Africa's media image.

These roles could be categorised along two broad axes: overt and covert. Regarding the former, some interviewees felt that their jobs often meant that their actions and conduct were inextricably part of those of the organisations they worked for. This meant that what they said or did, particularly in public but also in private, impacted directly on the organisation's image and therefore was a constant factor in the decisions they made. They were both figuratively and literally the faces of the organisations they worked for. This was mainly in relation to national audiences since they interacted with journalists and appeared in the media on behalf of the organisations they worked for.

Beyond this, however, interviewees also felt that their roles were sometimes overt. Examples of such instances were when they wrote speeches for their Country Directors, successfully lobbied journalists to cover particular stories or issued unsigned or uncredited communication material such as press releases and media adverts. When executing such roles, interviewees felt that their roles were similar to that of a painter; creating the object of attention without being the centre of attraction.

8.3.1 INGO Communications Workers as Faces of the Organisation

Whereas producing stories for Western audiences constitutes a significant portion of communications staffers' jobs, another critical role they play is to manage media relations for the organisations they work with (Save the Children, 2016b; World Vision, 2012). For national office employees, this is usually limited to national and regional media because INGOs tend to prefer that international media are dealt with by the corresponding national office. While locally-based communications workers in Uganda for instance are mandated to interact with and build relationships with local media such as the *New Vision* newspaper or Nation Television, any interaction with a BBC reporter would have to be coordinated with the organisation's UK offices. Nonetheless, the interactions with national media impact greatly on the INGO's image within the given country and potentially its standing with the country's local and central governments. As one interviewee explained:

> If I appear on a television or radio programme and either seem unknowledgeable about things or say something ridiculous, the organisation can get into a lot of trouble with the government and lose its credibility in the eyes of the public. (INGO Communications Officer 5)

For some of the communications workers, this role extended beyond their official, public statements to their personal, private actions.

> I am an ambassador for [the organisation]. Whatever I do, whether in public or private, reflects either negatively or positively on the organisation. Yes other staff members also can impact on the organisation but because communications work with the media regularly and are known by them, we are far more easily identified and singled out than for example our colleagues in finance or human resources. (INGO Communications Officer 3)

This perspective of being a representative of the organisation on and off duty was especially present among staff members of the faith-based INGOs I interviewed. Many told of having to forgo family or social functions they would have otherwise attended because they were taking place in a bar, nightclub or other such place that could bring the morality of the staffer – and ultimately the organisation's commitment to its faith-based values – into question.

Thinking of themselves as ambassadors of the organisation also appears to fulfil the communicative reflexive mode identified by Margaret Archer and discussed in Chapter 4.3. Specifically, the interviewee appeared to rely not on their own judgement but that of organisation they worked for in determining what their personal actions.

This perspective was not exclusive to faith-based organisations. At the time of conducting the interviews, the Oxfam and Save the Children scandals, in which senior staff members of these organisations were accused of engaging in sexual misconduct (Elgot and McVeigh, 2018), was only months old. While the accused staffers in Haiti allegedly engaged in these activities during their down-time, the premises they were accused of using were provided to them by the organisation. Furthermore, Oxfam itself made clear that employees are expected to live up to a moral code that they felt was clearly crossed in these incidents, describing them as "totally unacceptable" (BBC, 2018b). This scandal no doubt heightened the interviewees' awareness of and sensitivity towards their role as the faces of the organisations they worked for and it was frequently brought up as an example of the same during the interviews.

Those who viewed themselves as ambassadors of the INGO they work for also tended to factor this into the story production process, constantly being intentional about their conduct during field trips to communities. As a result, when interacting with beneficiaries, the media or any other outside party, such interviewees tended to consider such things as their dress code, accommodation and even driving habits as linked to the organisation's image. As one explained, driving too fast on a dusty road in a remote village may raise too much dust for pedestrians, which in turn may reflect negatively on the organisation, since the cars were branded. Likewise, choosing to stay at a hotel or motel that is near a night club could result in the community associating the employee – and the organisation they work for – with behaviour regarded as immoral in the community: “As members of staff of a faith-based INGO, we are expected to be above reproach” (World Vision Uganda Communications Staffer).

While the employees set such high standards for themselves, they do not seem to do the same for the beneficiaries they choose to write about. When selecting the family or individual beneficiary to interview, very little – if any – consideration was made about their private life, unless the issue directly relates to the story they are writing. Communications workers did not consciously seek out beneficiaries whose values conform with those of the organisation they work for. Even the faith-based INGO staffers said they would readily write about a beneficiary who does not share the same faith or whose lifestyle is in direct conflict with the organisation’s values, if the impact of the organisation’s programme or intervention is newsworthy. In some cases interviewees in faith-based INGOs suggested that this discordance would be highlighted in a bid to demonstrate that their programmes target those in most need of support, regardless of their faith.

This is significant because beneficiaries and their stories are prominent and integral parts of these organisations’ reputations, perhaps even more so than the employees. Emotive photos and video footage of starving children have long been linked to increased or successful fundraising (Orgad, 2015; Yanacopulos, 2015b; Franks, 2013). The authenticity of INGOs’ work often hinges on the stories they tell of the work they do and the narratives they share about their beneficiaries ultimately establish organisational legitimacy in the eyes and minds of the giving, Western public (DeMars, 2005). Yet while the INGO employees’ personal lives – which are neither the subject of the stories being told nor of interest to the target audiences – are expected to be in sync with the organisation’s values, those of the beneficiaries – on whom the organisations’ legitimacy and authenticity hinge – are not.

The explicit and widely acknowledged result of this self-perception by communications workers as being responsible for the organisation's reputation is that they felt either pressured (if their personal morality does not match that of the organisation) or required to conform to the INGO's stated values. One participant put it this way; "You cannot work for [this organisation] and drink [alcohol]" (INGO Senior Manager 4).

It is important to note that while it was not a view expressed by most of the interviewees, a few communications workers acknowledged that they carried this representational expectation over into their story production process; choosing to include or exclude potential subjects of their stories based in part on whether they adhered to the values of the organisation. As one participant put it:

> If I am looking for a success story that shows that a beneficiary has been positively impacted by our work, and I have the choice between one who happens to be polygamous and one who is responsible; for me personally, I would choose the responsible one because as [an organisation with Christian values] there is no way I would favour the polygamous one over the responsible one. Even if the story is about income generation, because of the organisation's values, you would rather tell the story the responsible one. (World Vision Communications Staffer)

Another interviewee, who works within the same organisation and was asked to opine on this scenario, came to the opposite conclusion:

> Actually for me I think it would be better to profile the polygamous beneficiary because this would not only highlight a regularly experienced reality of the community but also [the organisation's] commitment to serve everyone regardless of their values, as long as they are in need. (World Vision Communications Staffer)

While these two employees may have come to different conclusions on how to proceed, they were both primarily doing the same thing: viewing the story production process as one that has as much to do with the organisation's public image as it does with showing prospective or current benefactors the impact of the organisation's work. And because they saw themselves and the work they do as the 'face of the organisation', they mirrored their moral values on the prospective subjects in their stories and used these values to determine who would be the best beneficiary to interview.

In so doing, these INGO communicators demonstrated some autonomous reflexivity (Sayer, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 4.3, this mode is characterized by extensive internal and independent reflection and decision making. In this case, the World Vision interviewees used their personal understanding of the organisation to decide which beneficiaries to include or exclude from the stories they wrote.

However, given that the selection of which beneficiaries to profile tends to be done by the communications workers assigned the task – as opposed to, say, a group decision – it is possible that the majority of these workers subconsciously use this criteria to determine who to interview or profile.

As an ex-INGO communications employee myself, I can in retrospect recall times when I chose to profile beneficiaries who expressed the same values as the organisation I worked for because they felt like a 'natural fit'. They would be better ambassadors of the organisation's success because they were more agreeable to its values. And because they were in similar circumstances as those whom I considered less aligned to the organisation's values, it did not occur to me at the time that this was a necessarily significant part of my selection process.

Furthermore, what this attitude reveals is the extent to which organisational value systems – perceived or real – as interpreted by the communications worker take precedence over other concerns such as the image the produced story portrays of Africa or the African country in which the staffer is operating. Essentially, in times when the organisation's interests – such as raising funds by profiling need – and those relating to continental or national agencies are in direct conflict, the choice was clear:

> At the end of the day, we are staff members of the organisation. We are loyal to them and we will protect the interests of the organisations. That's our job. That's what we are paid to do. (INGO Senior Communications Staffer 15).

This perspective can be both conducive and unfavourable to employees' agency in the story production process. On the one hand, understanding oneself to be the face of the organisation can empower communication workers to initiate, advance or counter a narrative about the organisation, country or continent. Because they feel that they can determine the reputation or trajectory of the organisation, some of these communication workers also take it upon themselves to suggest new ideas or approaches to communicating impact. This was evident when I asked interviewees who felt they were the face of the organisation what role they felt they played.

> Communications plays a very important role. And it's also communications that will come back and tell you, "Hey, we actually need to do a bit of media monitoring to understand the situation of children out here". They might even be the ones who might help you get ideas of where to fundraise and how, and they will tell you about the current situation in the country because some people don't even read the papers for example. (INGO Senior Communications Staffer)

On the other hand, there is a sense in which feeling bound to or by the values of the INGO strips some of the communications workers of their agency. For them, because they must reflect the values of the organisation, their interpretation is that they are not expected to initiate the story production process but rather to simply facilitate it.

> Our major role in communications is to provide the narrative and kind of messaging that the organisation wants us to, regardless of our personal views. It is therefore important in certain situations to put aside our personal beliefs about how things should be and concentrate on depicting what the organisation wants. Whatever they tell us, we enforce. Our performance is reviewed based on how well we represented the organisation's views or position, not ours. (INGO Communications Staffer 2)

As seen in Chapter 6, one of the interviewees felt that at the beginning of their employment, the role of communications was quite shallow and passive: "I would see stories being sent to me to edit for the sake of being included in the report. That was the only reason why the stories were being taken and apparently, the only reason I was being employed!" (Bella Nyamamu, Save the Children).

This perspective echoes research by DeMars (2005) in which he argues that for NGOs to gain legitimacy, they must adopt four normative claims: a global moral compass, a modular technique, a secular sanction, and a representative mandate. That employees view themselves as being directly and personally responsible for the organisation's image strengthens INGOs' claims to be global moral compasses. This is especially true with faith-based INGOs like Christian Aid and World Vision which insist that their employees sign off on their institutional statements of faith as a prerequisite for hire. Even with organisations like Action Aid, Save the Children and Plan International, employees are required to undergo background checks and in the case of communication roles, they must have no previous record of child abuse since they would be expected to interact with children regularly.

Apart from the organisational values or statements communication employees sign up to, there are also sector-wide initiatives to monitor their personal conduct. An example of such initiatives is the Inter-Agency Misconduct Disclosure Scheme (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, 2019). Launched in 2019 in the wake of the sexual abuse scandals within aid agencies, the scheme mandates INGOs to register and centrally share any records of misconduct by their employees. Applicants for jobs within participating organisations are mandated to sign consent to having their record checked as well as updated in the system.

Although these legal requirements prior to employment instil a sense of personal responsibility among communication workers that is quite separate from that emanating from their functions, they add to their sense of personal responsibility. Increasingly, communication workers feel that this is becoming the norm for everyone employed in the aid industry. Having a sense of loyalty to the INGOs they work for also has the effect of making many of the communications workers feel more committed to the organisations' goals than to issues such as Africa's media image. The assertion by INGO Senior Communications Staffer 15 that they are ultimately loyal to the organisation means that when going about their story production processes, the interests of the organisation will likely take precedent.

This is insightful as it would explain the otherwise strange phenomenon of Africans being at the centre of Afro-pessimistic narratives. It allows us to appreciate the value-based judgements that guide INGO communications workers in Africa. In cases where their professional responsibilities clash with the identity politics of the continent, these workers make decisions in part based on the legal commitments they make to the organisations they work for. This does not mean however, that communications workers always choose Afro-pessimistic narratives over challenging such stereotypes. For some of the interviewees, pointing out and challenging negative narratives about Africa constituted a part of their responsibilities as the faces of the organisations. As one explained:

> Defending Africa's interests is what [the INGO they work for] is about. So for me, I don't see any problem with challenging a story that projects the continent or our beneficiary communities as helpless people without hope. Are they poor? Yes. But that doesn't take away their human dignity. And it is that dignity above all that I feel is often stripped from Africans by these media generalisations. (Action Aid Staffer)

In general, INGO communications workers felt that their roles came with responsibilities that made them the faces of the organisations they worked for. This had the effect of making them feel that they owed loyalty to these organisations and their principles. How this then played out regarding contesting negative narratives of Africa differed greatly not only between interviewees but also in terms of circumstances. While some felt that this loyalty meant that they prioritise the organisation's interests and goals above those of the continent's media image, others felt that as Africans, they had a higher duty to use their roles to challenge Afro-pessimism in INGO Communication. There were also others who felt there was no contradiction between contesting Afro-pessimism and representing their employees, since the stated goals of most INGOs aligned with challenging such stereotypes.

8.3.2 Communicators as Painters of the INGO Picture

Another significant way in which communications workers within INGOs viewed themselves was as artists who painted a picture or narrative about the organisation's work or even a particular country or the African continent. This perspective differs from that of being the face of the organisation in terms of positionality. While the face of the organisation is constantly and consciously part of or even all of the story being told, the painter takes a less visible stance, intentionally advancing their work rather than themselves. One of the interviewees put it this way:

> In some ways, it is like we are cameras. The stories and photos are written and drafted by us, but we are not the ones who choose when to click or what to point at. You know, we are merely responding to story and photo requests. So yes, we represent [the INGO], but only the way the [INGO] says we should. (INGO Senior Communications Staffer 6)

From this perspective, the communication workers' role is to facilitate the story production process. This is done by using their expertise, communication tools or influence to achieve an agreed upon goal. In World Vision Uganda, for instance, this may include organising media visits to the organisation's sites of operation, helping foreign media obtain accreditation by the state to visit humanitarian emergency response programmes, or providing unedited footage and photographs of in-country activity to (Western) donor offices for marketing, advocacy, or communication needs.

The position and agency of the communicator as a painter shifts from time to time in response to the desired outcome or 'painting'. When facilitating media visits, for instance, the desired objective is akin to that of agenda-setting. That is, to try and influence what the public thinks about (Wanta et al., 2004) and – perhaps more critically – "how to think about it" (McCombs and Shaw, 1993:62). Explaining their perceived role, one of the interviewees made it clear that influencing and framing the narrative was a core component of what they did.

> Communications also comes in to link up projects with media. So we use media as a key stakeholders to send out our messages but also to bring out change. When it comes to issues like influencing policy formulation, you can't do that without having a background, so you can have statistics but for you to bring out the background you also need other stakeholders, so the media then becomes a very good connection to be able to push out your issues. So we link media with stories, we share with them. If there is something that has been a success story, if you think it can be scaled up to the rest of the country, media comes in. So linking up the project teams of [the INGO] with media is also a key component of our communications function. (Kenyan INGO Communications Staffer)

This stance requires a delicate balance between pitching the organisation's narrative and allowing the media team invited to have – or appear to have – a semblance of independence from the organisation. Because journalists generally gain and maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of the public through claiming editorial independence from their sources (Gillmor, 2006), and yet at the same time often need INGOs to provide access to sites of humanitarian action deemed newsworthy (Wright, 2018; Waisbord, 2011), the INGOs have to tread very carefully. The process of negotiating through this sometimes murky and delicate balancing act is seen by many communications workers as a critical skill and role that they play on behalf of the organisation.

> I think communications staff members have a lot to contribute towards what is reported and how it's reported, especially in the humanitarian sector, starting with emergency disaster situations… Wherever there's a lot of human need, the communicators are there to tell the story, facilitate the process of that story being told by the media and, perhaps most importantly, to humanise the story. (Former Senior INGO Communications Staffer)

However, one of the challenges associated with this perspective of the role of INGO communication is its potential to facilitate "the spread of media logic and related forms of news cloning [thereby] undermining NGOs' values perspectives and working cultures" as well as undermining the "critical independence" of journalism (Wright, 2018:63).[17] In response to claims that INGOs overly influence the media through these kind of engagements, one interviewee noted that communications workers are aware of this tension and argued that they tend to respect journalists' independence.

> If you facilitate a journalist to go to the field and report on your work, you really have no control over what they will choose to report or the angle they will use. Yes you may pitch to them a certain angle, but ultimately, it's for them to decide. In fact, even if they end up being overridden by their editors when they get back and so even if you somehow get them to agree to your narrative, there is no guarantee that their editor will also agree to it. (Ugandan INGO Senior Communications Staffer)

This sense of respect for journalistic independence was shared by all the communications workers I interviewed. This is significant because while they seem convinced that their influence on the media is minimal, there are several positions of power throughout the collaboration process that they occupy and often utilise to achieve their desired narrative. One such instance is the power to provide a journalist with access. Because humanitarian crises tend to attract several INGOs, responses to them tend to be coordinated by committees representing the various INGOs, local leaders, the central government as well as members of the affected communities. For this kind of coordination to work, strict rules and regulations regarding access to the areas of operation like refugee camps or settlements is enforced, with outsiders requiring permits and authorisation from more than one agency. For instance, if a reporter wants to access the refugee camp in Bidibidi, northern Uganda, which hosts over a quarter million people from South Sudan, they will need a recommendation letter from one of the agencies operating in the camp, an access permit from the central government, transportation to and from the camp, along with other practical considerations such as a translator and guide.

[17] For in-depth discussion of critical arguments for and against INGOs' involvement in the news production process and the pervasiveness of media logic in INGO work, see section 3.2.2.

If the journalist works for a foreign media agency, they also need to be accredited by the Uganda Media Centre, a process that costs at least $175 (Government of Uganda, 2022; Shake, 2008; Uganda Media Council, 2006).

While it is in principle possible for journalists to do this independently, it is a practical nightmare and would require the engagement of fixers. On the other hand, if an INGO offers to provide the access, they can easily manage this process in part because they do so on a very regular basis for employees and contracted media teams but also because of their direct involvement in the coordination committees as well as their status and relationship with the central government: "For foreign journalists, we can get them accredited in two or so days while for local journalists, it's just a matter of agreeing with them on when they are able to travel" (INGO Communications Staff 19).

This power to provide journalists with the required clearance and documentation can and often does become a significant bargaining chip, with the journalist feeling dutybound to at the very least feature the organisation's work in their report and, at best, wholly adopt the INGO's narrative. Indeed, in my own experience as a Communications Specialist for one of the INGOs, having provided the necessary access to a foreign journalist, I was explicitly asked by them if there was an activity that was being carried out by the organisation that could be shot and used as cutaway clips in the story. In the end, while the published story focused on child soldiers, it included footage of the INGO I worked for distributing branded material as well as an interview with one of our workers based at the camp. Therefore, whether intentionally or not, INGOs do influence the narratives of media stories that are produced with their involvement or facilitation. That most of the interviewees I spoke to viewed their involvement as passive or without influence on the journalists' work revealed a surprising lack of awareness about their agency, a deliberate downplaying of their influence or a combination of both to varying degrees.

Given that these INGOs do not simply facilitate the journalists' access without having an agenda in mind, it is very difficult to interpret the interviewees' insistence that they respect journalistic independence as a naïve unawareness of their agency and power. Indeed, when this question was put to a consultant who is currently self-employed but has worked for several of the INGOs included in this study, their conclusion was that it was a public relations stand.

> Of course, they cannot say they know they influence the narrative. How does that help them? How does it further the organisation's reputation or agenda? It is the same with the journalists who work with [these INGOs]. Yes they have their values and are supposed to be independent, and if you ask them if their views or narrative was influenced by the INGO that helped them gain access, the official answer will be no. But who is it that arranged for the people to be interviewed interview? Who organised for the journalist to meet children in safe spaces run by the same organisation? Who provided background statistics about how many refugees are coming in regularly and what the needs are? Of course, it is the INGO. And that's how they control the narrative and paint the kind of picture they want without appearing to do so. It is public relations at its best. (Former Senior INGO Communications Staffer 2)

While this participant seemed to suggest a deliberate, calculated effort on the part of INGO communications experts to control the media narrative without being seen to do so, others felt that their relationships with the media were based on a merging of shared interests.

> The media are always on the lookout for news stories that inform, educate, or entertain. By virtue of the work we do, we tend to regularly come across newsworthy stories. And it is in the interest of both the communities we work with and our organisation that these stories are told. So as a representative of the organisation, I look for ways to advance its interests through the media. If the media felt that facilitating them to tell a particular story negatively impacted on their core values, they would simply reject our offers. (INGO Communications Staffer 7)

From this perspective, the covert communication efforts INGOs use in their media relations are not merely deliberate ploys to achieve their promotional goals but open, honest engagements with the media on issues of mutual interest. Whether deliberately manipulative or honestly collaborative, these covert methods of communication are increasingly used by

INGOs to gain influence in the media and by the media to gain access to stories. Neither party seem particularly bothered about how or whether these stories affect Africa's media image. Even in the cases where interviewees did feel a sense of duty, it was not strong enough to warrant a review of the narratives about Africa that these efforts produce.

Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda once described the development sector as "the international cartel of good intentions" (Mwenda, 2007:00:11:15-00:11:18). He argued that donors and INGOs work in Africa with the intention of improving the lives of disenfranchised communities and individuals. However, because of their sheer economic power and the legitimacy they enjoy in the eyes of Western governments and donors, INGOs become important policy-makers, holding sway on whether African governments continue to receive Western funding or not. In doing so, INGOs (unwittingly) make African governments accountable to donors and the West rather than the people they lead. The result, Mwenda argues, is that African governments become more preoccupied with their relationships with donors than they do with being accountable to their citizens. The citizens are thus further disenfranchised as they are now dependent on the charity of INGOs and patronage of their elected officials.

Similarly, even with decentralised governance structures and semi-autonomous INGO offices in East Africa, locally-based INGO workers are ultimately answerable to their employers and not the people they serve. The disconnect between the good intentions and the limited amount of agency ultimately results in compromising the former for the sake of fulfilling organisational promotional and fundraising goals.

The last section discusses the various ways in which gender, nationality and positionality impact and are impacted by INGO communication structures and processes.

8.4 Gender, Nationality and Positionality in INGO Communications

As discussed in section 3.6.2, women's role in development has long been a political and operational mainstay, with almost every programme, stakeholder and government making commitments to improve women's active participation in the sector's decision-making processes. There have also been some positive steps taken by INGOs towards gender parity documented, with organisations like Action Aid having initiated leadership training programmes specifically aimed at women (Jayawickrama, 2011).

But research over the past decade has revealed that although women are increasingly taking up management roles in INGOs, men still dominate senior leadership in these organisations (Avalos, 2019; Hopwood et al., 2018; Jaquette, 2017; Lawal et al., 2016; Roth, 2015; Knox Clarke, 2014). A recent report showed that while 70 per cent of staff members in the INGO sector are women, only 30 per cent of them reach leadership positions (Fair Share Monitor, 2021). In this section, I explore the applicability of these previous findings to the INGO sector in East Africa and particularly the role gender plays in the five INGOs' communication structures and processes.

8.4.1 Women Dominate the INGO Communication Sub-sector

Within the communications sub-field, research has previously revealed that women dominate both the operational and managerial spaces in INGOs' Western offices (Manola, 2014). This research found that this trend held true, even for non-Western offices. Except for Christian Aid, all the Communications Managers in the participating INGOs were women. In the case of Plan International and Save the Children in Kenya, all the permanent, full-time positions were occupied by female communications experts, with Plan Kenya employing one male staffer on a short-term basis as communications assistant.

Two things are worth noting about this finding: first, while Fair Share Monitor (2021), Roth (2015) and Manola (2014) examined INGOs' gender demographics from the perspective of their Western offices, this research provides a Global South view. Secondly, the difference in time (five years) and location (Global North and Global South) between the quoted research and mine did not translate into significant disparity in trends. Women dominate INGO communications at both managerial and operational levels in both Western countries and the Global South. I advance four possible reasons for this.

First, almost all job adverts by the five INGOs for national level positions encourage female candidates to apply. While this does not necessarily mean that women will be selected, it does give potential applicants the impression that qualified female candidates will be prioritised. An interviewee working in one of the organisations' human resources department agrees.

> When we add the bit that says, "women are especially encouraged to apply", we are not only signalling our awareness to the disproportionate access men enjoy over women in the workforce but also making a commitment to try and correct it. What that means is that if there are two candidates of either gender that are both qualified and it comes down to deciding which strategic direction we want to take, we are likely to consider the female candidate. (Senior Human Resources Staffer)

This stance translates into female communications experts being more likely to apply for INGO communications jobs and therefore being more likely to be selected. Inversely, the men I spoke to said they tended to ignore adverts that encouraged women to apply because they felt they were at a disadvantage.

> When I see "women are particularly encouraged to apply", I automatically assume that the hiring manager or organisation are actively looking to recruit a woman. So unless it is a really nice job or I feel like moving on from my current one, I don't apply. (Male INGO Communications Staffer)

However, this staffer did not necessarily view this issue as problematic. Instead, he felt that both the sector's focus on children and women as well as the tendency by INGOs to encourage women to apply was justified. He put it this way:

> The reality of the matter is that women are affected most by the income inequalities and other socio-economic dynamics that [the organisation] is trying to combat. There is no way I can be passionate about fighting injustice and not want to highlight its existence and what we are doing about it. And since it is women disproportionately affected, then of course women will be the main thread of our narrative. There is no way to spin one's way out of that reality. (Male INGO Communications Staffer)

Another possible reason for women dominating these roles is that the INGO sector as an employer is perceived to be more attuned to women's needs and concerns. Save the Children, Action Aid and World Vision all offer their employees maternity leave periods in excess of the legally mandated time (3 months), most of it on full pay, as well as medical insurance for both themselves and their immediate family. This is twice the amount of time legally mandated in both Uganda and Kenya. Also, because most of these organisations' work is focused on gender-related issues such as maternal health, breastfeeding, and gender-based violence, women feel safer, more committed and therefore more able to perform. They therefore were more attracted to the INGO sector than to similar communications positions in the corporate world.

Some of the female interviewees also noted that in the corporate sector, the pressure to perform sometimes meant doing a lot of out-of-office hours, which disadvantaged them given other responsibilities and expectations such as cooking for their families and childcare. To this end, they felt that although INGO work could be demanding too and require out-of-office work, it was more flexible and their supervisors were more sensitive to the personal responsibilities they bore.

> In the corporate world, it can sometimes feel like building informal relationships outside of the workplace is the only way to make it. For men, it's easier to hang out with the boys at a bar or over the weekend and you know, make the connections you need to make. But

> if you are a woman, even if you don't have children, that kind of networking can be very tricky because you can easily be taken advantage of or misunderstood. You must constantly think, "am I crossing the line here? Did I come off as being too friendly or suggesting more than just a professional friendship?" Most times, the risks just outweigh the benefits. (INGO Communications Staffer 21)

In the INGO sector however, many of the female interviewees felt that success depended on how well they did their job and there were more networking opportunities within the confines of formal structures, something they felt did not happen as much in the corporate communications or journalism sectors.

> Even here [within the INGO sector], networking is important. But the difference I guess is that because it is an international organisation, your work is not simply being seen by your immediate boss or even country office but globally. There's a sort of mini sector in which you can better compete on merit. So a Skype conversation with a colleague in say UK can be as profitable as what a drink at the bar would have been in the corporate sector because that colleague [in the UK] can highlight your work to the rest of the organisation. (INGO Communications Staffer 21)

On the other hand, this upbeat tone often quickly gave way to lamentations about the state of women in Africa, with many interviewees decrying Ugandan and Kenyan women's lack of power and agency, particularly in rural areas. Being women themselves, they felt particularly passionate about this state of affairs and often thought of themselves as ambassadors or representatives of the majority underprivileged women.

> As a woman, I would like to think that I am contributing directly to the progress of gender parity in the country. When you look at our beneficiaries, most of them are women and children and for me, that is a story I am proud to tell. (Save the Children Communications Staffer 3)

However, because INGOs are largely conceived of as Western organisations, their employees – even those locally sourced – are often seen by outsiders as agents of the Western agendas the INGOs are accused of peddling. As a development communications specialist myself, I often came across politicians, academics and even beneficiaries who felt that the organisations I worked for were essentially extensions of American and European imperialism. It was because of such accusations that Action Aid offices were shut down in Uganda in 2018, as discussed in section 3.4. INGO employees are therefore seen not primarily as nationals working with a locally-registered organisation for the betterment of their communities but as representatives of a Western organisation who simply happened to be Ugandan.

Therefore, whereas several of the female interviewees viewed themselves as advocates of their fellow women, that conceptualisation was not necessarily shared by those in the communities they served. This view is often magnified because INGOs employ highly educated and qualified women who work in some of the most impoverished communities in the region. The difference in education, class and other such socio-economic groupings limits the extent to which the female communications experts could claim to be representing INGOs' female beneficiaries. On the other hand, it is precisely these qualities (highly educated and experienced) that gain the INGOs legitimacy from Western audiences as they display their black, African, female communicators. Racialised market rationality in this case is further exploitative in a uniquely gendered manner.

8.4.2 Gender-based Challenges and Opportunities in INGO Communication

As part of this research, I had hoped to study the extent and nature of agency female communications experts have on INGO communications processes and structures. However, because all but one Communications Manager in all the five organisations was female, it proved difficult to draw any conclusive comparative observations about women's agency as there were insufficient male interviewees to provide the empirical data needed for such comparisons. Moreover, of the five INGO communication experts that were men, one was an independent consultant, one a Communications Manager and the other two junior staff members in communications departments. This meant that none of them held comparatively similar positions within their respective organisations.

However, considering the racialised market rationality discussed in 8.2.2.1, it is not difficult to see the related benefits INGOs enjoy from hiring black, female nationals for communications roles. In addition to the social and economic advantages that come from being seen to employ black nationals, INGOs also benefit from being seen as feminist – as advocates of gender parity. This is particularly true for communications employees because they are regularly in the public eye, speaking and writing on behalf of the organisations. This in part explains women's over-representation in INGO communication roles discussed earlier as well as in section 3.6.2.

Some of the interviewees also noted that their gender advantaged them over men by giving them the kind of perspective and access men would probably not get.

> If I am writing a story on an issue like maternal health, breastfeeding or gender-based violence, there is a certain accessibility I am afforded by the women that men simply cannot get. They just wouldn't. A breastfeeding mother may demonstrate to me the fact that her milk isn't flowing as well as it should or that the baby isn't latching as normal. That's not something they would be able to do if the communications person is a man. (Female Communications Staffer with Plan International)

To this female participant, therefore, her gender (and blackness) could be used as an extraversion tool, advantaging her in a sector that is male-dominated and highly racialised (Hagmann, 2016; Peiffer and Englebert, 2012; Bayart and Ellis, 2000). This observation is consistent with findings by Douglas (2019:141) in which black, female interviewees felt that "their ethnicity, and gender, gives them certain privileges when accessing stories".

To be clear, this increased access can be helpful in providing nuance and depth to stories related to maternal health or gender-based violence. The challenges with it in relation to Afro-pessimism are twofold. First, as many studies have found, Africa's media image happens to be historically and uniquely disadvantaged. Research by VSO (2002), Lader (2007) and Keim and

Somerville (2021) established that negative humanitarian emergencies and international development news from Africa tends to be perceived as circumstantial and natural, unlike other parts of the world in which such news tends to be problematised. As a result, even when stories such as those identified by the Plan International interviewee are nuanced and contextualised, they arguably perpetuate rather than challenge this media image. As with the Western media frames identified in African media by Wahutu (2018a) and Roberts and van Houten (2021), these stories and their frames remain more aligned to INGOs' fundraising and advocacy goals than to efforts to challenge Afro-pessimism. The argument here is that female INGO communication workers cannot be expected to challenge stereotypes about Africa merely because of their gender.

The second and perhaps more problematic challenge with such stories is what Nandita Dogra refers to as "feeding into a patriarchal culture" that shows women "in their place" as mothers and helpless victims in need of saving from the West (Dogra, 2012:64). To paraphrase Adichie (2009) (discussed in Chapter 1.1), the problem here isn't that such stories would be untrue but that they would be incomplete and would add to the many other incomplete stories about Africa that tend to dominate Western conceptualisations and influence Western audiences' perceptions about the continent.

Lastly, ten of the female interviewees also raised two gender-based occupational hazards worth discussing. The first was in regard to humanitarian crises. Data from development practitioners, journalism scholars and media reports has always indicated that during crises, women and children are usually the most vulnerable (Patel et al., 2020; Avalos, 2019; Hopwood et al., 2018; Roth, 2015; Franks, 2013; Dogra, 2012). This vulnerability is not limited to those impacted by the humanitarian crisis but also includes women working with INGOs to respond to these emergencies. As *The Guardian* previously reported, several cases of assault against female aid workers were registered in South Sudan (Secret Aid Worker, 2015), while in 2018, an implosion of historical cases of sexual assault in the aid industry led to a global conversation about it, consequently dubbed #AidToo (Cooper, 2021; Goncharenko, 2021). One of the interviewees put it this way:

> When you are in the middle of a humanitarian crisis, aid workers are exposed to the same risks as those they are serving. In fact, sometimes we are even more vulnerable because we are viewed as privileged. As a woman, I have to be far more careful than my male counterparts and in some cases even wary of them. This is not something you can easily talk about, but it is real. (Female INGO Worker 7)

Another participant narrated an experience in which she was accosted by a beneficiary community in the process of doing her work:

> I had deployed to [a refugee camp] to get impact stories about [the organisation's] work. Because I was carrying a camera, the place was hot and we were spending a week there, I had worn a pair of jeans and a branded T-shirt. All my male colleagues were dressed in similar fashion. But the moment we got to the camp and started interacting with the residents, some of the men started making disparaging comments about a woman wearing trousers. Some of the women laughed. I had planned to walk through the camp and talk to the people there while my colleagues went about their work. I decided instead to wait for one of my male colleagues to finish what he was doing and accompany me. The next day, I had to wear an ankle-long dress over my jeans, even if it was hotter than the day before. (Female Communications Worker 5)

The experience described by the interviewee highlights the gender-based challenges that come with working in the aid sector. Four of the five INGOs conducted special training for their employees working in hostile environments. The training, known as Hostile Environments Awareness Training (HEAT), equips aid workers with the skills and knowledge to survive deployment to humanitarian situations in which security risks are heightened. However, this training is very expensive and only offered to a handful of staff members. Moreover, while it is undoubtedly helpful when working in places like rebel-held sections, it does not necessarily address the gender-based risks female aid workers face, even in environments categorised as non-hostile.

My research extends the deconstruction of INGO communication by demonstrating that in the INGOs analysed, women are firstly in charge of telling Africa's development story and secondly, tend to view themselves as ambassadors or representatives of African women. Also, even though they have little control over what messages INGOs choose to disseminate to Western audiences (that is decided by Western support offices as determined by fundraising needs), they do get to influence who these messages include or exclude. Their activist stance, coupled with the simplistic, colonial narratives required by the fundraising offices mean that as Douglas (2019) asserts, INGOs perpetuate Afro-pessimism, with black women playing a central role.

8.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which East African INGO communications workers in the five INGOs interpret the term Afro-pessimism. I argue that while most of them were not familiar with the term per se, they were extremely media literate, demonstrating considerable expertise about the workings of global media and its effect on the continent's image among Western populations. When given a broad description of Afro-pessimism, most of the interviewees agreed with the view that it exists but tended to blame the media for it while justifying their own role in perpetuating the same. The key observation I make here is that, as discussed in section 2.2, Afro-pessimism is presumed to be an outsider perspective of the continent, with very little if any consideration given to the role(s) played by African actors in its perpetuation.

When justifying the continued production of sad stories and shocking images that build into infantilised narratives of Africa, interviewees cited the limited control they had over the media along with the need to achieve INGO promotional and advocacy goals as the reason for adopting rather than challenging media logic. As seen in the previous chapter, this assertion is problematic given the intricate ways in which the media interact with INGOs, influencing and being influenced by content and processes provided by the charities. Also, given their advocacy goals, I also argue that even independent of the media INGO communications workers tend to produce stories that reinforce simplistic, racialized narratives about the continent as well as negative predictions. This is in part due to an imbalance in agency that foregrounds the promotional and fundraising needs of Western INGO offices over the nuanced and contextualised communication necessary to counter Afro-pessimistic This, I argue, demonstrates that INGOs have adopted racialised market rationality as defined by Douglas (2019) and discussed in section 3.6.1.2.

I also discussed the various forms of self-perception INGO communications workers have in relation to their role, demonstrating how this in turn affects the extent to which they claim any agency in the story production process. While they view themselves as having some impact on the images of both the organisations they work for and the African continent to Western audiences, this impact or agency is limited in scope and consequence. This is largely because when it comes to organisational and communication objectives, locally-based INGO communications workers felt they had limited input; for instance, they pointed to several steps they took to ensure that their personal lives did not impact on their employers' image, but said they were unable to influence what kinds of stories the Western offices took from them.

Lastly, I discussed the gender dynamics inherent in the sector, demonstrating that these INGOs overwhelmingly employed female workers in communications roles. I found that many of the female interviewees felt a particular responsibility to highlight the challenges faced by women and children in the communities in which they worked and that their gender gave them access to stories, information and sources that their male counterparts were unlikely to penetrate. This access was to gender-sensitive stories such as rape, breastfeeding, female genital mutilation or other gender-based frames. While this could potentially result in more accurate or intimate stories being produced, it did not necessarily lead to narratives that challenged Afro-pessimism. There was therefore no correlation observed between the gender of INGO communication workers and the type of narratives in their stories.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

Most research about INGO communications conducted to date has focused on three issues. First, INGOs communication as it relates to Western media and journalism (Douglas, 2019; Powers, 2018; Wright, 2017; Abbott, 2015; Wright, 2014; Rothmyer, 2011; Waisbord, 2011; Fenton, 2010; Abbott, 2009; Galtung and Ruge, 1964). Secondly, researchers have increasingly been interested in how INGO communications have portrayed the Global South, with particular focus on Africa (Douglas, 2019; Anyangwe, 2016; French, 2016; Paterson, 2016b; Bunce, 2015a; Franks, 2013; Dogra, 2012; Rothmyer, 2011; Khor, 2010; Dogra, 2007; Shivji, 2007; Sankore, 2005; Manji and O'Coill, 2002; Achebe, 1977). Lastly, there has been significant research into how INGO communication products are received by the public, particularly among Western audiences (Deridder et al., 2020; Seu, 2015; Orgad and Seu, 2014b; Dogra, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2010; Khor, 2010; Musila, 2008).

This thesis investigates INGO communications as practiced by five such organisations with offices in Uganda and Kenya. I particularly explored the ways in which the organisational structures, processes and communications employees work to challenge or perpetuate Afro-pessimistic narratives and reflected on why this is the case. In this chapter, I provide a thematically structured discussion of the key findings made in my empirical chapters and the implications they have on both historical and current debates about Afro-pessimism in INGO communication. In the first section, I answer my three research questions, discussing the implications of my findings. I then identify the limitations of the research as well as the opportunities for further research, before concluding with an overview of the key theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions this research makes to INGO communications scholarship.

9.2 Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the organisational structures, processes and practices through which INGOs produce stories about their work in East Africa?

In Chapter 2, I surveyed previous research about Afro-pessimism. I demonstrated that whereas there appears to be a historical consensus among scholars that INGOs contribute to the perpetuation of Afro-pessimism, there is a small but rapidly increasing interest in the specific ways in which this happens and a desire to both theoretically and empirically clarify the term (Hellmann, 2020; Nwachukwu and Ogundiwin, 2020; Nothias, 2018, 2015). In Chapter 3, I argued that problematising the structures, processes and practices through which INGOs communicate is a key part of achieving this clarity.

Most research on INGOs tends to assume a homogeneity in their operations, with each charity researched as one entity. However, as I demonstrated in Chapter 6, although INGOs tend to brand themselves as homogenous entities, they are actually a collection of several nationally registered legal entities. Each of the five INGOs studied has a different governance structure, ranging from centralised systems that concentrate power in the hands of a few Western offices and largely decentralised structures with federated governance bodies.

Specifically, I found that Plan International and Save the Children gave their Western offices significant legal and programmatic autonomy. Plan International for instance had a Members' Assembly and International Board as the highest decision-making organs. The Members' Assembly consists only of Western (fundraising) offices while the International Board consists of individuals appointed by the Members. Each of these Members – called National Offices – is accountable to their donors through their national regulators. There is no legal accountability to or agency of Southern offices at this level. Similarly, Save the Children's highest decision-making body is a secretariate composed of 30 national offices, with none from the Global South.

On the other hand, World Vision has a highly decentralised system in which all national offices, regardless of whether it is a (Western) support office or (Global South) field office, have semi-autonomy, with National Boards providing overall governance and strategic guidance. To ensure global coordination, the organisation has a Global Board, consisting of members nominated by national offices through their regions. It also has a Council consisting of the leaders of each national office. Action Aid and Christian Aid have organisational structures that have transitioned to hybrid governance structures that have decentralised certain aspects of their decision-making processes while maintaining centralised ones for others.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I argued that because of mediatisation, the rise of promotional culture as well as increased inter- and intra-organisational contestations for limited attention from traditional media, INGOs now have elaborate communications structures at global, regional and national levels. The empirical data collected and discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 demonstrate that INGO communications workers in East Africa tend to be highly media literate, with experience ranging from 3 to 15 years' experience in media and communications. While some of the organisations, such as Save the Children, Plan International and World Vision, employed communications workers who specialised in sub-sectors like emergency communications and public relations, others such as Christian Aid and Action Aid expected communications employees to focus largely on building the capacity of non-communications (programmes) staff and partners that the organisations worked with to write or heavily contribute to the stories they produced.

While all the INGOs studied had what they referred to as regional offices, they each categorised them differently. While Action Aid and Child Aid conceptualised regions as entire continental blocs and had regional staff members based in any national office within the said territory, others like Save the Children, World Vision and Plan International had regional blocs clustered around geographic entities (East Africa, West Africa, Southern Africa). This appeared to be largely a function of organisational reach, with Action Aid and Christian Aid being present in fewer African countries than the other three.

In either case, the regional offices appeared to be established largely for coordination rather than programme implementation purposes. As such, regional communications directors and managers tended to provide advice – not leadership – to national office staffers on implementation of communications projects and goals. Most communication assignments were discussed and implemented between Western support offices and Southern national offices.

Financially, I found that field offices depend almost entirely on the support received from support offices in the global West as well as individual and institutional donors – also from the West. Because these donors have specific and sometimes differing reporting requirements for each project, communicators often have to adhere to different sets of rules and regulations around how and what to communicate, even when these projects are targeting the same community and are interlinked.

The effect, as discussed in section 8.2.2, is that INGO communication structures and processes are set up to meet the needs and expectations of the donors rather than the communities the organisations work in. But as I argued in section 6.4.1, even the donors are varied and have different reporting schedules and expectations. As a result of development programming being siloed, communication products are often limited in scope, with very few holistic stories. The narratives derived from such reportage, therefore, are often simplistic and lacking in context.

Finally, I found that in practice, INGO communications workers tended to work very closely with and prioritise both local and international journalists. This is because, as discussed in sections 4.2.1 and 7.4, they viewed traditional media as an important channel for achieving their advocacy and branding goals. Their relationship with the media however was multi-dimensional. Most of the participants claimed that they had no editorial influence on the media and indeed my observation with INGO 1 (see section 7.2) showed that even with significant investment of time, resources and information in media coverage, media organisations did not necessarily report as extensively on the INGO's event as they had hoped. However, the provision of transport allowances or facilitation by INGOs to journalists, along with the linked professional histories of journalists and communications workers, meant that their interactions were multifaceted with each party influencing the other at one point and being influenced at another.

Overall, this research demonstrated that INGO communication occurs in complex, multi-layered structures and processes that have locally based staff at the core of the story production both internally (that is, within the organisation and its partners) and externally (with local, regional and international media and the public).

9.3 Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do these organisational structures, processes and practices affect the distribution of power between INGO Communication staff based in East Africa and the West?

Local agency, or lack thereof, has always been a sticking point in international development. Freire (1970) advocated for local solutions that put farmers and their aspirations at the centre of development programmes, while Escobar (2011,1988) challenged the concepts of underdevelopment as colonial narratives used by the West to subjugate the Global South.

This research found that in spite of varying governance and operational structures or processes, power within INGOs' communications functions remained mostly skewed in favour of

Western offices. Specifically, INGOs' Western offices retain the power to not only determine what is communicated but are also heavily involved in deciding how it is communicated. This is mostly because INGO communications structures and processes are largely built around fulfilling Western donors' expectations as well as attracting new donors from the West. Because the responsibility to raise finances is largely left to INGOs' offices and audiences in the West, I found that INGO communications employees in East Africa were almost entirely focused on generating impact stories and narratives that fulfilled or fed into the fundraising strategies determined and implemented by their Western counterparts. One of the fundraising strategies adopted by all the INGOs was to engage Western media. This involved generating communication material that would be attractive and compatible to Western media agendas. To achieve this, INGO communications workers adopted the media logics used by mainstream media, reproducing essentialised, racialised and selective narratives.

When it comes to engaging the media, Western/support offices wield more power than Southern field offices. In section 8.3.1 for instance, I showed that any interaction with Western media by field offices tended to be closely monitored and managed by the corresponding Western office of the INGO. Southern offices are often unable to independently engage Western media. This, however, does not mean that INGO employees in the Global South are without agency. As I demonstrated in 6.2, several INGOs were keen on (and in the process of) not only being seen as having their headquarters based in the Global South but also devolving power to their national offices. This presents Southern offices with an opportunity to challenge or amend stories ideas and narratives proposed by Western offices. However, this power tends to be concentrated in the hands of non-communications leaders such as the Country Directors as well as programme implementation managers.

At employee level, section 6.4.1 showed that some communications employees succeed in obtaining significant agency in the story production process through gaining the trust of senior leaders at both national and support offices. This trust enables them to pitch story ideas and push back on narratives or story angles they feel take away the dignity of beneficiaries or feed into Afro-pessimism. It also means that while they can have some influence on who gets to be included or excluded in INGO communications, the power to determine overall narratives and agendas remains firmly in the hands of Western offices.

Nonetheless, I conclude that this agency tends to be achieved through informal, intra-organisational relationships and usually depends on personal initiative rather than institutional mandate. For the most part, INGO communications employees in both Uganda and Kenya find themselves doubly constrained by the narrative priorities set by the West and the outlying position communications tends to hold within national offices. The INGOs' organisational structures therefore do little to empower South-based communications staff.

This research also identifies sites of opportunity for agency on the part of INGO field office communication staff. These include determining which community voices to amplify (or not), what stories to coproduce or feed to national media, as well as using their professional relationships with colleagues in the West to challenge Afro-pessimistic narratives. Some Communications Managers, especially those with more experience and awareness of representational politics, were able to successfully push their agendas both at a national level (with national media) as well as internationally with support offices.

9.4 Research Question 3 (RQ3): To what extent and in what ways do the organisational structures, practices and workers' role-perceptions reproduce Afro-pessimism in INGO Communication?

In terms of organisational structures, this research found that the governance systems adopted by INGOs directly influenced the kinds of communications strategies adopted.

Communications employees of INGOs who adopted centralised governance structures and decision-making processes controlled by Western offices tended to view themselves as having less agency than those with decentralised governance structures. In organisations such as Save the Children and Plan International, communications workers tended to exercise agency through informal and personal avenues. For instance, they relied on the relationships built with decision-makers at national level as well as informal negotiations with Western offices.

In INGOs with decentralised or federated structures such as World Vision and, to some extent, Action Aid, communications workers felt empowered to speak up and challenge or renegotiate communications assignments or processes. However, even in these organisations, there was a feeling among participants that the agenda tended to be set by Western offices and that although they theoretically had the power to speak up, it was limited to agenda-setting rather than narrative framing as discussed in 6.4.2.

As far as the story production process is concerned, this research found that despite attempts by INGOs to project themselves as reflexive and responsive to criticism, their communications workers constantly find themselves adopting a media logic that is in direct conflict with their organisations' normative values. I found that while interviewees constantly acknowledged the need for more positive stories about Africa, they often deflected the responsibility of making this happen to the media. Many pointed out that because INGOs work for and with the poor, stories about their work were ultimately bound to focus on negative narratives and that traditional media had the opportunity (and responsibility) to juxtapose such stories with more positive ones to give (Western) audiences a more holistic picture of the continent.

However, these INGO communications workers tended to work very closely with the media, adopting their logic in a bid to influence the reporting for branding and advocacy purposes. In so doing, they became too involved in the news making process to claim innocence or challenge the media logic they identified as flawed. Moreover, because their stories tended to infantilise and feminise development work in Africa (by overwhelmingly focusing on women and children), INGO communications workers in East Africa tended to repeat the same mistakes their Western counterparts are often accused of.

While I noted a tendency to employ women for communications roles, as has been previously observed by other research(ers), the gender of the communicators in and of itself did not appear to have much impact on what Dogra (2012) refers to as infantilising and feminising narratives and frames in INGO Communications. This was because the tendency to produce stories focused on women and children was more a function of the sector than it was of the producers of the stories, given the limited agency the latter have in the former. Both female and male interviewees indicated that they felt a need to act as representatives of the underprivileged and to highlight their stories. As one participant aptly pointed out, INGO communications staff cannot just write what they want. Their stories must fit narratives predetermined by the fundraising, advocacy and promotional needs of the organisation. Therefore, because development work is generally aligned to governance structures, practices and role-perceptions that privilege Western (donors') perspectives and needs over those of beneficiaries, African communication workers have little choice but to produce stories that perpetuate Afro-pessimistic narratives.

9.5 Limitations of Research and Opportunities for Further Research

This research has some limitations owing to its conceptualisation and methodology. Conceptually, it is limited in scope to INGOs communications in East Africa. Even within the region, the research focuses on only five INGOs and their operations in Uganda and Kenya. There are reasonable justifications for this: the relatively high concentration of INGOs in the region, the historical, colonial relationship that the UK has with countries in the region, my prior experience as a communications professional there, and the finite time and resources available for the research.

The effect of this scope is that it limits the extent to which the findings can be said to be a general reflection of INGO communications on the continent. Because the participants represented a diverse section of Africa-based communications workers in five different organisations in two different countries, the findings can, to a limited extent, be said to reflect INGO communication. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see future comparative analyses with smaller INGOs' communication strategies and structures as well as research that takes a closer look at differences in INGO communications approaches between African countries and regions.

Methodologically, this research is largely qualitative, relying heavily on participant observation, semi-structured interviews and prior professional experience as the primary research methods. On the one hand, these make for rich insightful observations and analysis of INGO communication within the five organisations. On the other, these approaches also present interpretive and transferability challenges, with the possibility that other researchers conducting the same research with the same methodology may come up with different results.

Also, as discussed in the methodological chapter, the vast amount of data analysed in this research was collected over a relatively brief period of time. Participant observation was conducted in two of the five organisations and even then, a total of 6 weeks was spent doing so. This did not provide me with enough time to, for instance, observe any differences in the way these organisations operated during fast-moving humanitarian crises or differences in interaction between the communications departments and several other divisions.

As is the case with the conceptual limitations, these methodological challenges limit the representativeness of the findings. However, the unique approach used (combining previous industry knowledge with participant observation and semi-structured interviews) also presents more opportunities for further research. For instance, a longer, more in-depth study of INGO communications processes, tracking conceptualisation, production and publication of stories by communication workers in local, regional or international newspapers, televisions or radios would potentially provide even richer data and understanding of institutional and national sub-cultures within the field of INGO Communication.

9.6 Key Contributions of Research

Despite the limitations discussed above, this research makes several contributions to communications and media studies that can be categorised as theoretical, methodological, and empirical. I discuss each of these below.

9.6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research builds on previous work to provide clarity on the breadth of INGO communications. In Chapter 6, I map out INGO communication hierarchies and locate its position within the wider context of INGO operations in East Africa. In Chapter 7, I study its relationship with journalism, but from the perspective of Global South-based INGO communication workers. Finally in Chapter 8, I consider the various ways in which INGO communication is perceived by its custodians (INGO communications workers) as well as the ways in which gender, nationality and positionality affect or get affected by it.

Additionally, my research expands on the conceptualisation of Afro-pessimism to include viewing it as an extraversion strategy by Africans working in INGOs. I do this by first establishing in Chapter 2 that researchers such as Rieff (1998), De Beer (2010), Nothias (2018,2015,2012) and Hellmann (2020) cumulatively provided clarity on the definition and attributes of Afro-pessimism. I note however that in all these studies, Afro-pessimism has been perceived as something that happens to Africa(ns), with little discussion or analysis of Africa and Africans contributions to it. In the more recent past, however, there has been a growing recognition that Africans also contribute to Afro-pessimism at both institutional and individual levels. Research by Roberts and van Houten (2021) and Wahutu (2018a) has demonstrated that African traditional media are as guilty of publishing essentialised and racialised news stories about other parts of Africa as Western media, in part because they have relied on the same news agencies as the West for foreign news.

However, I argue that, recognising the reality of inequity in international news flow, INGOs along with African institutions and individuals have tended to use Afro-pessimistic narratives as a tool for resource mobilisation in the form of development aid. While previous research has identified the employment of a dependent relationship to appropriate agency as extraversion, the concept had yet to be directly linked to Afro-pessimism.

In linking the two, I also propose that Afro-pessimism could be studied from a moral economy perspective. I demonstrated that the reason it persists, even in the face of increased criticism is in great part because of the way international development is structured. For as long as international development communication efforts continue to be focused on fundraising and advocacy among (potential) benefactors, the narratives of the stories produced will remain largely Afro-pessimistic in nature.

This finding speaks directly to sector-wide calls for the adoption of a localisation agenda. To fully achieve localised development, local actors and communities will have to be reimagined in international development planning- including the programmatic theories of change- as the largest stakeholders on equal footing with or even higher than donors. Although it is beyond the scope of this research, one way to do so could be to conceptualise them as donors too, with their investment being in form of time spent participating in these programmes. Further theorisation of this is required.

9.6.2 Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, this research contributes to deconstructing mainstream conceptualisations of INGOs as homogenous, Western organisations working in the Global South. By profiling each of the five institutions' organisational structures, this research has demonstrated the complex and highly variable nature of INGOs. While some retain the Western-controlled, top-down structures of governance, others have evolved into federalised institutions with Southern offices enjoying a significant amount of independence and agency. Others have adopted hybrid structures and processes that are decentralised in some aspects and centralised in others.

I have combined well-established qualitative research methods with post-colonial positionality, providing insight into the complex and fluid, agentive decision-making INGO communications workers apply to the story production processes, particularly when collaborating with journalists.

9.6.3 Empirical Contributions

The research provides empirical evidence of the increased participation of actors from the Global South within INGOs. Specifically, I have demonstrated the primacy of South-based communication workers in the story production processes of INGOs, albeit with limited agency.

Relatedly, by analysing the reflexivity of African communications workers on Afro-pessimism within the sector, I foreground them and their contributions not just to INGO communications in general but specifically to the perpetuation of Afro-pessimism. Scholarly inquiries into humanitarian news from Africa by INGOs are hard to come by, but as has been previously pointed out, "getting these stories right undoubtedly matters" (Aly, 2016:146). To be clear, many scholars have called attention to the huge deficit of Afro-centric research and methodologies. This research contributes to the limited, albeit growing scholarship aimed at filling this gap of knowledge. This research provides an additional layer of empirical data to research into Afro-pessimism by specifically exploring the ways in which African communication professionals, working in the African offices of INGOs contribute to the continent's negative media image and the moral economic logic involved in doing so.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Solicitation E-mail

Dear (Name),
Greetings from the University of Leeds. My name is Muganzi Muhanguzi Isharaza (Ganzi) and I am a Ugandan PhD researcher at the University of Leeds. I write on the advice (name and relationship), to find out whether it is possible to get a research placement with(name of the organisation) communications department in (country). Please find below, an overview of my research and what I seek from Save the Children for your consideration.

The nature of my PhD in Brief
My PhD research aims to understand, document and theorise the story production structures, processes and practices of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). Stories produced by INGOs are used in various ways (news items on television, newspapers and radios) to inform various audiences (sponsors, funders, general public, policy makers). While a lot of research has been conducted regarding the effects of these stories, there is still limited understanding on how these stories get produced, who gets involved in their production and why. This research aims to shed more light on this by interviewing INGO communication staff as well as management involved in the story production process as well as observing them perform it. I am particularly focused on INGOs that have operations in East Africa and are headquartered or were founded in the UK.

How I would like to Conduct my Research
Option 1: The main research method for my research is participant observation: I am looking to join an INGO's communication team in (country) as a researcher for a period of 1-3 weeks. During this time, I would be observing the Communication Staff go about their regular duties. Of particular interest to me will be the way they get to conceptualise stories from the field (preferably a mix of Humanitarian Emergency Action and regular community development impact stories), source/gather information for them, write/edit them and eventually how these stories get to be used by the organisation both locally and at headquarters. In terms of timelines, I'm looking to anywhere between March and June 2018.
Option 2: In the event that this is not feasible with your organisation, I would be happy to interview conduct interviews with your communication team (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda) regarding the same subject matter. In this scenario, I would conduct semi-structured interviews (I would provide general guidelines of the research parameters but have open-ended questions and follow-up questions). These would ideally be conducted over 30min-1hr periods depending on their availability.

I am adequately funded for my fieldwork during this time and would therefore not require or expect any payment from your organisation during this time. For practical purposes, I may end up using the organisation's resources during field trips (e.g. travelling in an organisation car or sleeping in your accredited accommodation). As and when this happens, I would be happy to acknowledge that in my final work and/or bear the cost of these trips.
The entire period of my research will be 3-4 months. During this time, I will be collecting information and interviewing Communications staff from several organisations in East Africa. As earlier mentioned, this information gathering will take two forms; participant observation and interviews. For the period of participant observation, I would like to be based

in the organisation's country office, but travel to the field as and when the communications team is scheduled to do so for the purpose of generating stories and content to be used in stories.

Because I am fully facilitated for this project, I would therefore not have any salary expectations. Because I am a former Communications Specialist with significant field experience in Development Communications, Donor Relations, Emergency Communications and Social and Behavioural Change Communication, I am able and would be happy to engage in writing stories, photography, filming or any other communication as might be required by the country office during my time in the field, as long as this is treated as separate from my time there as a researcher and does not affect my access and permission to observe and document the Communication team's work.

A little bit about myself

I am a Communications professional with over a decade's experience in journalism, public relations and communications work. During this time, I have worked with various charity organisations including World Vision and Compassion International at both country and regional levels. During my time with World Vision (2012-2013), I worked as Acting Country Communications Manager and Senior Communications Officer of the Uganda office, where I was deployed to various emergencies such as the Nodding Disease outbreak in northern Uganda, landslides in Western and Eastern Uganda as well as the refugee Crisis at the DRC/Uganda border. I was also a member of the Africa Regional Disaster Management Team and was deployed to Mali as an Emergency Communications Officer on secondment for three months. After participating in Emergency Communications training in Kenya and Zambia, I worked with the East Africa Regional team to conduct similar training in Uganda for new communications staff from across the region. I also underwent security training to enable me deploy in hostile environments.

I left World Vision in September 2013 to pursue a Masters in International Communications at the University of Leeds, after which I returned to Uganda and worked as Communications Manager and Lecturer at Uganda Christian University (2015-2016). In October 2016, I returned to the University of Leeds to pursue a PhD in Communication, which is the reason for my current interaction with you. More information here:
http://media.leeds.ac.uk/people/muhanguzi-muganzi/

I hope the information I have provided will enable you to make a positive consideration of my request to conduct research with your organisation. I have also attached my curriculum vitae and Project Participant Information sheet for the PhD. In the event that you require further information, I would be happy to furnish it.

Kind regards,
Ganzi M. Isharaza
School of Media and Communication
University of Leeds
+447397967125
Skype: ganzi.muhanguzi
Twitter: @GanziMuhanguzi

Appendix II: Consent Form

Title of Research Project: **An Analysis of International Non-Governmental Organisations' Story Production: Processes, Practices and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa** **Name of the Researcher: Muganzi M. Isharaza**	Add your initials next to the statement if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before, during or after the interview (up to July 2018 at which point the researcher may have anonymised the data or used it in ways that it is not possible for him to identify and/or exclude my contributions) without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. To withdraw, contact: Muganzi Muhanguzi Isharaza, School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds Mobile: +447397967125, Email: cs10mmi@leeds.ac.uk. You can also contact my PhD supervisor by email: c.paterson@leeds.ac.uk In the event that you choose to withdraw during the interview, all data already provided prior to the withdrawal will be deleted and excluded from the research unless written permission is obtained from you to have it included	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name **may be** linked with the research materials, and I **will be** identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research **UNLESS** I choose not to (Please tick the next box if you would like to have data collected from your interview anonymised)	
I would like my name and other personal information anonymised as a condition for taking part in this research	
I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research and/or publications, including book chapters, journal articles and conference presentations	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors and/or the Researcher's supervisors from the University of Leeds where it is relevant. I give permission for these individuals to have access to this data.	

I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.	

Name of participant	
Contact (Email/phone number):	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date*	

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix III: Participant information Form

Participant Information Sheet

An Analysis of International Non-Governmental Organisations' Story Production: Processes, Practices and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to accept this invitation, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted, what your participation will involve, how the information you share will be handled as well as your rights to withdraw from the research.

Purpose of the Project

This project is part of my PhD research which aims to understand, and document the story production structures, processes and practices of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). Stories produced by INGOs are used in various ways (news items on television, newspapers and radios) to inform various audiences (sponsors, funders, general public, policy makers). While a lot of research has been conducted regarding the effects of these stories, there is still limited understanding on how these stories get produced, who gets involved in their production and why. This research aims to shed more light on this by interviewing INGO staff involved in the story production process as well as observing them perform it.

Participation in the Project: What Will it Involve?

You are being invited to participate in the project because of your knowledge of and experience in the production of stories by INGOs. The interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes (although this is flexible and can be changed) and will involve semi-structured questions. I will be recording your responses with a voice recorder as well as a taking notes. The location of the interview will be flexible and dependent on your preference and convenience. In the event that a physical meeting is not possible, I could arrange for a Skype, email or phone correspondence at a time of your convenience. If at any point during the interview, you do not wish to answer a particular question or would like to end the interview, you can do so without giving any reason.

Type of Information and Importance of Your Contribution/Participation

Given your experience and involvement in the production of stories for INGOs, your perspectives and insights will go a long way in enabling me to understand what processes are involved, the essential practices employed in the story-production processes and the structure(s) of communication departments in INGOs. The questions you will be asked will be centred around understanding your work processes (or your past work processes), how you do/did it and why it is/was done that way. While some of the information sought will be institutional (for instance who is authorised to commission, edit and approve a story assignment) I will also seek to understand some personal decisions; for instance how you decide to focus on a particular beneficiary, what you consider when developing the story and how much involvement you allow the subject(s) of your stories in deciding the story's focus or angle.

By taking part in this project, you accept for the data collected to be used in relevant future research, including journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations.

Confidentiality and Withdrawal

Upon starting the interview, you will be given this information sheet and a consent form. If you are a senior member of staff at an INGO or member of the Communications team and are typically authorised to speak to the public on behalf of the organisation, **my default expectation will be that information shared is on record (that is, quotes can be attributed to you directly)**. If you are not a senior member of the organisation and/or would like to have the information you share anonymised, please tick the anonymity clause on the consent form and all steps will be taken to retain your anonymity in publication of quotes, especially if you would be in a unique position- e.g. where the description of your employer or job title would disclose your identity.

Regardless of whether your contributions are anonymous or not, all steps will be taken to protect the data generated from our interaction. This will include storing the information on encrypted external hard drives and the university of Leeds' secure data storage network. Interviews will be audio recorded, unless you prefer not to, in which case notes will be taken.

The raw data, including transcripts and recordings will not be made available to any other persons or for any other purposes other than the aims of this research as detailed earlier.

You will be able to withdraw from this research at any time before, during or after the interview, up until the July 2018 without giving any reason.

Contact Point for Further Information

Thank you for taking the time to read through this information. It is my hope that you will be able and will choose to participate in my research as your involvement will most certainly shed unique light on the story production processes, practices and structures of INGOs. Should you have any follow up questions on this matter, please feel free to contact me using the following address:

Muganzi Muhanguzi Isharaza
School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds
Mobile: +447397967125
Email: cs10mmi@leeds.ac.uk
Skype: ganzi.muhanguzi
Twitter: @GanziMuhanguzi
http://media.leeds.ac.uk/people/muhanguzi-muganzi/

Appendix V: Interview Questions

Example of Interview Questions[18]

Preliminary questions

Please explain to me what your role is and what you do in (the organisation)

How long have you worked in (the organisation) and in what positions?

How long have you worked in the INGO sector and where?

Role of Communications in Organisational Structure

What's the role of Communications generally in (the organisation)?

What would you say is your biggest audience as a communications department

What are the specific things done by Communications office to engage with the local communities for purposes of Accountability?

How would you describe your relationship with the support offices, for instance in the UK?

Would you therefore say it is a top-down relationship, horizontal, mixed or something else?

Communications Process

How about the editing process? Do you usually send support offices raw or edited footage?

Is there any influence that the staff here have on the editing process or should there be?

Are there times when the information of a story is sent to the SO but it is edited in such a way that the eventual story is different from what was originally conceived here?

How do you feel about that?

INGOs say they speak on behalf of the poor in the South. Do you feel that this is true for (the organisation)? Explain.

Is the communications department integrated in all the organisation's activities like monitoring and evaluation or community relations, or is its role more limited?

Is Communications involved in the process of the baseline surveys?

Does humanitarian emergency communications take up a lot of your department's time?

During humanitarian emergencies, what do you feel are the most important things to communicate?

How about in cases where an emergency is complex? There's a lot of political issues involved, possibly even governments and they can't be explained in a one-pager. One of the problems people have with NGOs is that they are sometimes simplistic in their messaging: these people are in need, please help. What is your opinion on this?

[18] This template was used as a guide to start the interview. Follow-up questions differed greatly depending on the answers given by interviewees.

Agency of locally-based staff

Do you feel that the national offices like this one and local staff are empowered enough to generate information about the organisation's work in the country or is the top-down relationship too strong to allow that?

If you were to make changes about the way communications is structured, what would they be?

Do you feel that Comms is central to the NO or on the fringes as a support function?

Is there anything about communications in (the organisation) that you would like to share?

Appendix VI: Country Director Job Description Sample

Save the Children - Nigeria: Country Director - Nigeria

4 February 2019

About Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children and works in around 120 countries to save children's lives; to fight for their rights; and to help them fulfil their potential.

Save the Children works to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. Across all of their work they pursue several core values: accountability, ambition, collaboration, creativity and integrity.

In 2012 Save the Children touched the lives of over 125 million children worldwide and directly reached 45 million children.

Mission Talent has been tasked by Save the Children with providing an exclusive search for the position of Country Director for Nigeria, who will lead the transformation of the country to a new operating model, whilst also delivering Save the Children's strategy within the country and the programmes managed by the country office through delivering quality programmes, including advocacy, for children; and serving Save the Children Members and their donors.

Role Purpose

As a member of the West and Central Africa Senior Leadership team, you will have shared accountability for Save the Children's international development and emergency programming in the region of approximately $120 million in 2014 through an organisation of nearly 1500 people. To achieve our ambitious goals and breakthroughs for children, the leadership team will, in collaboration with Save the Children Members and in conjunction with the other regional organisations, aim to drive growth to $2 billion by 2015.

The Country Director will lead the transformation of the country to a new operating model, whilst also delivering Save the Children's strategy within the country through:

- Delivering quality programmes, including advocacy, for children; and.
- Serving Members and their donors.

Scope of Role

Reports to: Regional Director West & Central Africa.

Dimensions: Nigeria is a single entity country, requiring a vigilant focus on staff safety and security management. Save the Children works in over eight states in Nigeria with a current staff complement of approximately 160 staff and current expenditure of approximately GBP 6.8 million each year. Our programme implementation is focused in the Northern States including Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara where we have offices and in Jigawa, Gombe, Yobe, Bauchi and Kaduna where we work with and through partners. The estimated budget for 2014 is around $30 million.

Staff directly reporting to this post:

- 1 Deputy Country Director.
- 1 Director of Program Operations.
- 1 Director of Program Development & Quality.

- 1 Head of Safety & Security.
- 1 Director of Finance.
- 1 Director of HR & Support Services.

Key Areas of Accountability

As a member of the Regional Senior Leadership Team, contribute to strategic development and delivery of international programming, in both humanitarian and development contexts, in line with the Save the Children mandate, strategy and theory of change

Deliver transformational change in-country, including:

- Developing and delivering improved outcomes for children through delivery of the Save the Children global programme strategy and global initiatives and growth targets as set for the country.
- Defining and implementing the new operating model for the country, in consultation with the Regional Director and Transition Team.
- Engaging Save the Children staff, partners and other stakeholders to create real shared ownership and collaboration.
- Creating an environment of continuous learning, where staff are encouraged and supported to grow and develop and are willing to be held accountable for their commitments.
- Ensuring that the focus of the organisation remains on the rights

and needs of children. Be accountable, and develop the capacity of,
mentor and hold staff accountable for:

- Developing strong country strategy and operational plans that identify and address significant issues facing children, and are in line with Save the Children's overall strategy (with a focus on Global Initiatives) and theory of change.
- Preparing for and implementing rapid and effective responses to major emergencies affecting children, including building relationships with key humanitarian and development decision-makers and partners in-country.
- Delivering programmes and advocacy in line with the country strategy, operational plans, budgets and Member requirements that result in significant impact for children.
- Collaborating with colleagues in the region to deliver any regional programmes and advocacy, in line with regional strategies, operational plans, budgets and Save the Children member requirements that result in significant impact for children.
- Developing and maintaining good relations with Members and their donors.
- Growing the country programme to become the leading NGO addressing children's issues in the country.
- Developing and maintaining efficient and effective operating systems, and ensure compliance with all Save the Children Essential Standards, with a particular focus on safety & security management.
- Developing and coaching staff to optimise their potential in pursuit of Save the Children's objectives.
- Contributing to global knowledge and learning in Save the Children.

Be accountable, and develop the capacity of, mentor and hold Senior Management Team accountable for:

- Role modelling and leading the way on the new values and ways of working.
- Developing strong country strategy and operational plans that identify and address significant issues facing children, and are in line with Save the Children's overall strategy (with a focus on Global Initiatives) and theory of change.
- Preparing for and implementing rapid and effective responses to emergencies in-country affecting children.
- Collaborating with colleagues in the region to deliver any regional programmes and advocacy, in line with regional strategies, operational plans, budgets and Save the Children member requirements that result in significant impact for children.
- Building relationships with key decision makers and partners.
- Developing and coaching staff to optimise their potential in pursuit of Save the Children's objectives.
- Contributing to global knowledge and learning in Save the Children.

Skills and Behaviours (Our Values in Practice)

Accountability:

- Holds self accountable for making decisions, managing resources efficiently, achieving results together with children and role modelling Save the Children values.
- Holds the team and partners accountable to deliver on their responsibilities – giving them the freedom to deliver in the best way they see fit, providing the necessary development to improve performance and applying appropriate consequences when results are not achieved.
- Creates a managerial environment in-country to lead, enable and maintain our culture of child safeguarding.

Ambition:

- Sets ambitious and challenging goals for self and team, takes responsibility for own personal development and encourages team to do the same.
- Widely shares personal vision for Save the Children, engages and motivates others.
- Future oriented, thinks strategically and on a global scale.

Collaboration:

- Builds and maintains effective relationships, with own team, colleagues, members, donors and partners.
- Values diversity, sees it as a source of competitive strength.
- Approachable, good listener, easy to talk to.

Creativity:

- Develops and encourages new and innovative solutions.
- Willing to take disciplined risks.

Integrity:

- Honest; encourages openness and transparency.
- Always acts in the best interests of children.

Qualifications and Experience

- Experience of working with large, complex donors to secure and/or manage new large-scale and/or competitive funding.
- Experience of building, leading and developing a team of senior staff with different backgrounds and expertise.
- Experience of managing a crisis situation requiring quick changes to priorities and rapid action to respond.
- Experience of leading change in an organisation which has led to considerable results for the organisation and its stakeholders.
- Experience of building personal networks at a senior level, resulting in securing new opportunities for the organisation.
- Experience of solving complex issues through analysis, definition of a clear way forward and ensuring buy-in.
- Good understanding of programme, financial and operational management processes.
- Good understanding of key trends in international and humanitarian development.
- Experienced leader who has held senior positions in complex/high profile/ multinational organisations.
- Demonstrable ability to recruit, lead and develop high calibre specialist senior staff with a range of backgrounds and expertise.
- Strong track record in building high performance teams and future successors/leaders.
- Experience of leading a large, highly complex organisation through significant change with clear business benefit.
- Strategic thinker who is comfortable with developing highly ambitious business strategies at scale and the track record of delivering on these.
- Ability to manage and motivate self and others to respond to a significant and complex crisis situation in extraordinary circumstances, requiring swift action and rapid changes in priorities.
- Evidence of identifying and building strategic and effective business networks at a very senior level, which have resulted in clear business benefit for the organisation.
- Innovative approach to solving a range of highly complex issues and galvanising buy-in to the solutions at all levels.
- Highly developed political acumen and ability to navigate through complex political situations.
- Strong and nuanced cultural awareness.
- Commitment to the Save the Children values.

Appendix VII: Job Advert for Communications and Media Relations Manager

Plan International Kenya

Plan International was founded over 75 years ago with a mission to promote and protect the rights of children. The organisation was set up by British journalist John Langdon-Davies and refugee worker Eric Muggeridge in 1937, with the original aim to provide food, accommodation and education to children whose lives had been disrupted by the Spanish Civil War.

Role Purpose

The Communications & Media Relations Manager will provide strategic leadership and management in enhancing corporate communications; build the brand profile and visibility of the organisation internally and externally; promote Plan International's global campaigns at country level; develop in-country campaigns for communications and advocacy, optimise information and knowledge management and documentation to profile the organisation. Plan International Kenya is also increasing its focus on humanitarian response and the position holder will be required to raise the profile of the organisation as a humanitarian actor.

Accountabilities and Main work activities

Corporate Communications (35%)

- Lead and manage the formulation and implementation of Country Communications Strategy in line with the five (5) year Kenya Country Strategic Plan whilst being cognisant of global strategy and campaigns;
- Provide strategic advice and support to the leadership team, technical advisors and Programme Unit Managers in relation to communications as well manage risks related to Plan International's communications and media work;
- Communicate Plan International Kenya achievements and lessons learnt in order to influence change at policy level and raise its profile as a key player and expert in the thematic areas identified in Plan Kenya's Country Strategy;
- Ensure adherence to communication policies, protocols, standards and implement guidelines for producing communications content across Plan International;
- Ensure the consistent and correct use of all the corporate and branding elements in line with the global brand guidelines and approved project brand books for all communications and IEC materials and in public events;
- Lead the production of high-quality communication products including information packs, power point presentations, press releases, speeches and talking points, annual reports, organization profile, newsletters, photos and video and multimedia content;
- In liaison with programme staff, lead the production of creative key messages appropriately tailored to external and internal audiences including through the production and dissemination of reports, the organization of events and conferences;
- Provide strategic and tactical emergency communications to increase visibility of the country office as a humanitarian actor;

- Lead internal communication and keep staff regularly informed of up-to-date organizational developments at global, regional and country level through effective channels;
- Take full responsibility for performance management of all direct reports, work closely with them to define their performance objectives, mentor and focus their work to be in line with Plan International values;
- Develop a communications budget, monitor the use of the resources and take appropriate actions to optimize use of funds;
- Support the development of Plan International Kenya staff's communication skills;
- Manage all external consultants as required for the achievement of agreed outputs.

Digital Communications (10%)

- Develop and disseminate a digital communications strategy in line with the country strategic plan and global priorities to convey the right messages to the targeted audiences using the right channels;
- Communicate the global/country social media policy and protocols to all users;
- Oversee the website content management to ensure it is relevant, accurate and up to date.

Campaigns (10%)

- In liaison with the Director of Programme Strategy, Development and Innovation and the Influencing & Advocacy Advisor, lead and support campaign initiatives in relation to Plan International's global and local campaigns, organise events and ensure appropriate messages for the local context;
- Establish, strengthen and maintain strategic partnership and alliances with campaigns and advocacy partners;
- Support in the production and dissemination of positions papers and statements, key messages, fact sheets on the campaign themes.

Media Relations (25%)

- Establish, strengthen and maintain strategic partnership with media and public relations partners in order to boost Plan International's public image, profile and visibility in the country;
- Ensure that Plan International Kenya is positioned high and known as a pro-adolescent girls and young women organization through creating of opportunities for media engagements;
- Support the positioning of Plan International Kenya as a charity of choice – for development and humanitarian works using targeted mass media both at country and county level;
- Build the capacity of staff, children, adolescents and youth on media engagements to adequately prepare them to engage with media.

Information Management (10%)

- Support the programme staff, ensure the effective gathering, packaging, management and sharing of critical information required to achieve country program goals, external influence and strategic directions.
- In collaboration with Technical Advisors, ensure that reports are professionally and efficiently produced and disseminated to all stakeholders.
- Support user friendly systems or infrastructures are in place where learning resources are shared.

Requirements

Leadership competencies

- Set and communicate ambitious but realistic work goals and priorities for the team, explaining how these contribute to Plan International's country strategic plan and global purpose;
- Set high standards for self and others' behaviours, inside and outside work, championing Plan International's values and commitment to rights, gender equality and safeguarding whilst supporting the health, well-being and both physical and psychological safety of our staff, including their safety to speak out;
- Hold self and others to account for what Plan International agrees to, dealing with poor performance quickly, firmly and constructively;
- Create a positive team spirit, helping people work well together, to reflect and continuously improve the efficiency and quality of what Plan International sets to do;
- Collaborating with team members, colleagues and partners in finding creative solutions to problems by sharing information, experience and ideas and actively seeking their input;
- Motivating and developing others by taking an interest, giving constructive feedback and praise, ensuring they. Are properly trained and helping them develop their potential;
- Positive about change and supporting others in adjusting to it, helping team members understand.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES

- Enforces appropriate use of brand throughout all written and verbal communications.
- Understands relevant sectoral context including how the sector operates in terms of funding and governance and awareness of Plan International's purpose, values and global strategy;
- Manages legal and reputational risk including risk assessment, communication, risk management and reporting in full compliance with risk-related standards, including in areas such as Child and. Youth Safeguarding and Protection, Gender Equality and Inclusion, counter fraud, safety and security;
- Managing activities and resources including skills in planning and organising, financial and project management;
- Managing people and information including skills in communication, both speaking and writing, digital working including personal digital skills.
- Managing resources and delivery: Knows the resources required for their role. Manages their own workload, avoiding under or overcommitting to delivery activities; Works according to a budget and uses the relevant financial systems.; Works according to principles of data protection; Understands how information is used for reporting and decisions making; Seeks to continually improve personal working practices.
- Programme and project management: Aware of the programmes that Plan International delivers directly and through partner organisations. Aware of the programme and project management procedures relevant to their role.; -Complies with financial procedures and controls relevant to their role; -Seeks opportunities to reflect on and learn from all work.
- Digital working: Identifies ways to use digital to improve the effectiveness of work activities. Understands how digital enablers can contribute to achieving Plan International's purpose. Utilises the digital tools available in line with privacy and safeguarding guidelines.
- Evidence-based management: Understands the importance of high-quality data and the implications of poor data. Understands what data Plan International needs to inform decision-making. Interprets a range of sources to inform evidence-based decisions relevant to their role.
- Cascades knowledge throughout the organisation by sharing key messages, having team meetings and working collaboratively with other teams or departments.

- Encourages two-way channels of communication, facilitating conversations using digital and non-digital methods.

Educational Qualification and Experience Required

Essential

- Bachelor's degree in Communication, Public Relations, Journalism, Media Studies, International Relations or Marketing;
- At least 7 years of relevant working experience of which at least 3 years' experience should be in a management/leadership role;
- Experience in developing and implementing communications strategies;
- Knowledge in digital communication and social media;
- Writing skills including ability to write press releases, editorial pieces, speeches and presentations;
- Event management skills;
- People skills – able to interact, supervise, negotiate, influence, network, advocate and facilitate;
- Good understanding of child protection and development issues.

Qualifications/ experience desirable:

- A relevant Masters' Degree in Communications, Public Relations, Journalism and Media

Languages required

- Excellent written and verbal communication skills in English;
- Working knowledge of Swahili is desirable;

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

Behaviours:

- Role model our values and behaviors both internally and externally.
- Engages sensitively with community members on issues of gender equality and inclusion, demonstrating an understanding of the local culture and context.
- Promotes equality, including gender equality, inclusion and girls' empowerment in Plan International's work and in its work with partners
- The ability to build collaborative working relationships
- Uses creativity to challenge the norm and promote innovation and thinks and acts for the wider organization – linking partnership opportunities with the context of the wider organizational strategy
- Communicates effectively at and with a range of appropriate styles for different audiences
- Builds capability through knowledge sharing, networking, mentoring, coaching and advocates the importance of knowledge management

Deadline for Application: 6th June 2022